

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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MUSIC IN APPALACHIA

Music in Appalachia



THEN

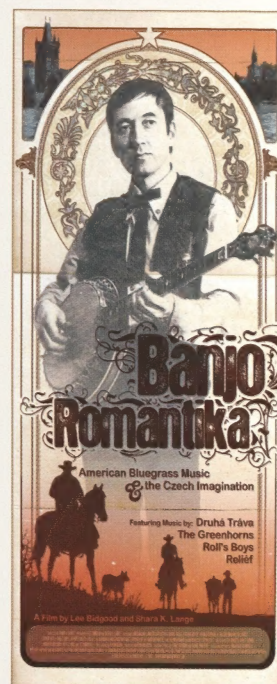
Poster announcing Flatt & Scruggs concert in West Grove, Pennsylvania, on September 16, 1962. Courtesy Archives of Appalachia's Deneumoustier Collection, East Tennessee State University.

Flatt and Scruggs and The Foggy Mountain Boys performed and recorded (in various forms and line-ups) from 1948 until 1969. The band is considered one of the premier bluegrass groups in the history of the genre. In December 1962, Flatt and Scruggs appeared at Carnegie Hall, and their iconic "The Ballad of Jed Clampett" (theme song for *The Beverly Hillbillies*) reached No. 1 on the country music charts in early 1963. While the television show appeared in more than seventy countries, bluegrass music was introduced to an audience outside the United States even before television became the "new hearth" of postwar America.

NOW

Banjo Romantika, a feature-length documentary released earlier this year, introduces audiences to musicians from the Czech Republic who play a unique bluegrass hybrid. Czechs first heard the music during World War II when Armed Forces Network broadcast popular music of the day to both sides of the "Iron Curtain." The film was directed and edited by Shara K. Lange and is based on research by Lee Bidgood.

Learn more at www.banjoromantika.com.



ON THE COVER: According to an Appalachian Regional Commission map, Nashville's Davidson County is separated from Appalachia's border by one county. However, one does not need a map to recognize the symbiotic relationship between Nashville and Appalachian mountain music. On September 17, 2013, Old Crow Medicine Show (see article on page 10)—the band folk icon Doc Watson heard playing in front of a pharmacy in Boone, North Carolina, before offering them a gig at the MerleFest music festival (2000)—was formally inducted into the Grand Ole Opry. Also featured onstage in the tan sport coat (third from the left) is Del McCoury (see article on page 61). Photo by Andrea Behrends, courtesy the Old Crow Medicine Show website, www.crowmedicine.com.

MUSIC IN APPALACHIA

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Editor	Fred Sauceman
Managing Editor	Randy Sanders
Poetry Editor	Marianne Worthington
Book Editor	Edwina Pendarvis
Music Editor	Wayne Winkler
Photo Editor	Charlie Warden
Graduate Assistant	Emily Booker
Center Director	Roberta Herrin

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Write to us at:

Center for Appalachian Studies & Services

ETSU Box 70556

Johnson City, TN 37614-1707

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By February 28, 2014

The Best of Thirty Years of Now & Then

No deadline; new submissions not accepted



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NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

MUSINGS

- 2 *Be Still. Hear. Know.* Roberta Herrin
- 3 *Editor's Notebook* Fred Sauceman

MUSIC in APPALACHIA

- 5 *Mountain Music* Patty Loveless
- 6 *Finding Country Music and Community in the Tri-Cities* Lee Bidgood
- 8 *Jean Thomas and the American Folk Song Festival* James M. Gifford
- 10 *Old Crow and Appalachian Soul* Jennifer McGaha
- 13 *Martin Music* Anne Chesky Smith
- 17 *Looking Up: The Saucemans* Fred Sauceman
- 22 *The Johnson City Sessions* Wayne Winkler
- 27 *A Radiator Shop Transformed: Site of 1929 Johnson City Sessions* Jeff Keeling
- 29 *Virgil and Rayford* Julia Watts
- 32 *The Cigar Box Guitar* Margaret Nava
- 34 *Blacktops and Cheating Songs* Judy Lee Green
- 36 *Cowboy Copas* Danny Fulks
- 39 *Fly Swift Around Ye Wheels of Time* Dana Wildsmith
- 42 *"Hell's Broke Loose in Georgia!"* Ted Olson
- 45 *Sweet Georgia Brown* Edwina Pendarvis
- 48 *An Appalachian Score: A Family's Musical Heritage* Melissa Nipper
- 51 *J. William Adkins: Telling Tales* Randy Sanders
- 55 *Musical Journeys and Improbable Connections* Jack Tottle
- 58 *Bluegrass Music in the Land of the Rising Sun* J. P. Mathes II
- 60 *Right in the Middle of It: A Great Musical Migration* Daniel Boner

POEMS

- 4 *The Road to Arcadia* Robert Morgan
- 16 *Carter Scratch* Michael Chitwood
- 33 *Fiddling at Midnight's Farmhouse* Clyde Kessler
- 41 *Hymn* Llewellyn McKernan
- 54 *Moonshine Blues* Savannah Sipple
- 72 *Drone String* Sherry Cook Stanforth

MUSIC

- 62 *Music in Brief* Wayne Winkler

BOOKS

- 64 *An American Vendetta* T. C. Crawford
- 65 *The Always Broken Plates of Mountains* Rose McLarney
- 66 *A Killing in the Hills* Julia Keller
- 67 *Kentucky Traveler* Ricky Skaggs, with Eddie Dean
- 69 *Books in Brief* Edwina Pendarvis



BE STILL. HEAR. KNOW.

ROBERTA HERRIN

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES



At the appointed hour, leave your cell phone inside the house and lock the door as you depart. Halfway down the path, do not look back. Remember Lot's wife? Do not return to unlock the door and pocket the phone. Take a risk and unfetter yourself from the Disney-bright icons, the metallic ring tone, the human voice, and the purr of the digital machine. Disengage for a spell. You will not dissolve into the great void but will stay solid and sentient. Solipsism has no place where you are going. This is a day for music, not metaphysics.

Walk deep into the woods and seek out a flat rock at the foot of an old tree—oak, walnut, or giant hemlock will do. Sit. Settle your back against the rough bark and welcome the slight discomfort that will tether you to wakefulness. Breathe deeply. Smell the leaf mold that feeds the forest. Feel the energy of photosynthesis, oozing tree resin, pumping mouse heart, churning earth worm.

At first, your brain clutter will override the red squirrel's chatter in the canopy. He is tuning up and worried. The swell of his fretting will soon redirect your self-focus, and you will wonder what woodland crisis he protests. When the strident crow joins his alarum, you know they have hit upon a singular motif—ridding the woods of you. But don't leave. If you stay very long and very still, their notice will abate, and they will settle into their own harmonies while you disappear—to them and

to yourself. In this transcendent state you will hear the mountain symphony, Opus I, *The Genesis of Knowing*: The tremolo of twin birch trunks, bark scraping bark. The thud of black walnuts striking the undergrowth. The staccato of a hen turkey's cluck. The riffs of the bird chorus.

When fog moves in, the audible mist strikes leaf and stone in a mass of nothingness. The wood wind is counterpoint to the crackle of leaves stuffed into the gray squirrel's mouth. Hear the scratch of her claws on trunk and limb as she rises to her tree-nest, builds it against the coming cold, and descends. She will repeat this movement to perfection—do not applaud at its end.

Now you are more alive and real than you have ever been while manacled to twitters and buzzes and mechanical voices that are transmitted but not transcendent. Now you are witness to the music of the spheres—not Pythagoras' mathematical harmonies but the wild hymnody that anchors the self to the source of all knowing, the source of all music.

At the coda, rise and stretch. Offer a grateful bow to the players, and next week or tomorrow, at the appointed hour, leave your cell phone inside the house and lock the door as you depart. Halfway down the path, do not look back. Remember Lot's wife?

Be still. Hear. Know. ❖

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

FRED SAUCEMAN



The Floyd Country Store, Floyd, Virginia. Photo by Fred Sauceman.

Floyd, Virginia, says the county's Chamber of Commerce, has more musicians per capita than New York City. While hundreds of communities in Appalachia can easily make a similar claim, I found an especially deep level of respect for the music of the mountains at the Floyd Country Store. An unusual indicator of that respect is the fact that, after 6:30 in the evening on Fridays, you cannot order a milkshake. Although the music stage is at the back of the store and the soda fountain and food counter are at the front, staff insist on shutting off the milkshake maker so the whirl of the machine will not disturb the musicians during the Friday Night Jamboree.

In this town of about 430 people, bordered on the east by the Blue Ridge Parkway, the floors of the century-old country store rumble with cloggers and flatfooters, once the 6:30 gospel hour is done and the first bluegrass fiddle tune commences at 7:30.

Built around 1910, the store once sold everything from farm supplies to penny candy. Woody Crenshaw, the current owner, calls himself a transplant, raised in Raleigh, North Carolina. A lighting professional by trade, he says when he first moved to Floyd, he expected to blend into the hills and live out the rest of his life

growing vegetable gardens. But then he bought the Floyd Country Store.

"The store has brought this community together and illuminated the music of this region," Woody tells me. "Owning the country store is a responsibility that I really cherish. What's so wonderful about it is that in this world of many things being artificial, and so many things across the country being homogenous, there is this very important, unique event every Friday. It's different than anything else, and it's also very natural. There's nothing imposed. People aren't trying to make an impression. They're here, enjoying themselves with their families, and what's really gratifying is to get out on the dance floor late in the evening and just feel the real joyfulness that people have. It's one of the few things that you can count on being really uplifting, and it's like that every week."

For thirty years now, the Floyd Country Store has hosted the Friday Night Jamboree, a major stop on The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail. As *Now & Then* itself approaches our own thirtieth anniversary, we bring back a popular theme from the past, the music of Appalachia, with the hope that this issue is as uplifting as a Friday night in Floyd. ♦



THE ROAD TO ARCADIA

ROBERT MORGAN

When I was stubborn at the age
of two or three, refusing to
lie down for nap or rest – my play
too colorful and various,
too dissonant and multiple,
to turn away from, time too rich
with possibility to yield –
my mother knew just what to do.
She'd take a seat beside the fire
and pat her lap and start to sing.
It could be any song at all,
a hymn, or carol, Stephen Foster.
I can't explain the powerful pull,
the magnetism of her voice.
But dropping what I had I ran
to lay my cheek against her chest
and feel the notes through air and flesh,
the measure of the heart itself,
and drift away on melody
to my particular arcady.

Robert Morgan's most recent book of poems is *Territor* (Penguin, 2011). *The Road from Gap Creek*, his latest novel, is a sequel to his best-selling novel *Gap Creek* (1999). A native of western North Carolina, he has taught at Cornell University since 1971.

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

PATTY LOVELESS

In the hills of Henry Clay, Kentucky, I heard my momma shout, "Patty Lee, get out from under that porch. They's liable to be a DREADFUL SNAKE under there."

So, you think the shortest increment of time is the changing of a New York City traffic light, and the honking of the first horn? You're wrong. It was this little girl remembering and instantly feeling an old mountain song.

There are little girls and snakes, and then there's THE Little Girl and THE DREADFUL Snake, as sung by Appalachia's Ralph and Carter Stanley. "Little Girl" and "Dreadful Snake" provoked a deep feeling that rang in this young mountain girl's soul. And when I heard my momma shout out those words, I moved real quick. Mountain Music moves you.

Mountain Music is much more than lyrics, much more than the deceptively simple instrumentation; it's a feeling. It's a sound that can make you laugh. It's a sound that can make you cry. It's a sound that lives only in the mountains of Appalachia. And like the mountains, it's sometimes cruelly harsh but always cathartic and therapeutic. It's a sound that rips your heart apart and then hands you the strength to put it all back together. A sound that makes you meet your emotions head on and give in to them. You may want to laugh, you may want to cry, but you will always lift your head and sing.

Whether it's Molly O'Day's "The Drunken Driver" or The Carter Family's "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?," the mountains of Appalachia dig deep into human emotions.

Just listen to the age-old mountain song, "Pretty Polly." It sounds very simple, but it deals with a very complex set of emotions: If I can't have her, then nobody can. And even if she accepts my request for her hand in marriage, I can't marry her because my family won't



Patty Loveless. Photo by Joseph Anthony Baker. Courtesy Saguaro Road Records.

accept her. In very plain language, the song explains an age-old theme. And no, it's not a pretty song. And no, it's not a pretty ending. But it's real life. And the music of Appalachia is about real life, and real outcomes. It's real people singing real songs about real people.

I was born in January of 1957 in Pikeville, Kentucky, and shortly after that, the Flood of '57 hit the

Appalachians. Ninety percent of the coalmines were flooded. Bridges and roads were out all around the region. From southeast Kentucky to southwest West Virginia; from southwest Virginia to northeast Tennessee, the damage was widespread.

The proud people of the mountains took it on the chin. And what did they do? They did as they had always done. They picked up and started over. They sang about the hard times, and they sang about the good times. They sang. That's what I recall about my earliest experiences there. Everybody sang, and that way of life stuck with me.

My daddy (like his daddy and his daddy's daddy) was a miner. The great songwriter Darrell Scott wrote, "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive," an autobiographical portrait of his coal-mining family and the region's life. I adopted that song (I hope with Darrell's blessings) as my own. The lyrics, typical of the tradition of mountain songs, are simple but devastatingly hard-hitting:

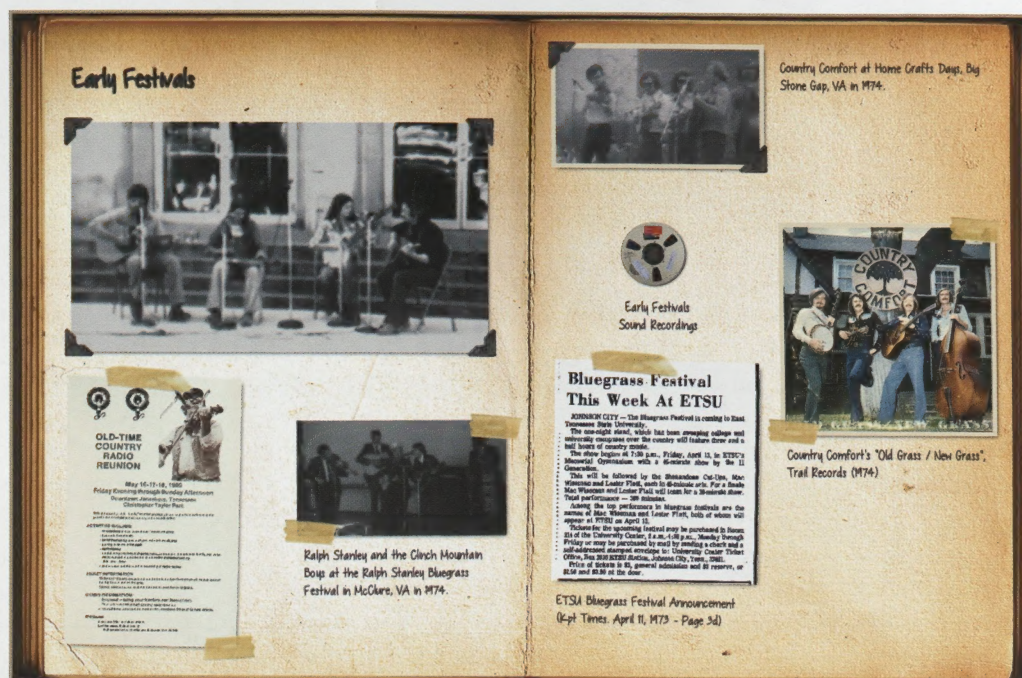
Where the sun comes up, about ten in the morning/
And the sun goes down, about three in the day/
And you fill your cup, with whatever bitter brew you're
drinkin'/ And you spend your life, just thinkin' of how
to get away.

Like Darrell, I found out: You may try to leave the mountains, but they'll never leave you. ♦

Patty Loveless has charted over forty singles on the Billboard Hot Country Songs charts, including five number ones. Four of her albums have achieved Platinum status and two Gold. She has been a member of the Grand Ole Opry since 1988.

FINDING COUNTRY MUSIC AND COMMUNITY IN THE TRI-CITIES

LEE BIDGOOD



Screenshot of *Country Music and Community in the Tri-Cities* kiosk. Photo courtesy author.

When Dr. Roberta Herrin asked me if I would consider curating a third installment of the Reece Museum music kiosk on the campus of ETSU, I could never have imagined what I was getting myself into. She suggested that the new volume of the multimedia electronic “scrapbook” could cover the era between the existing volumes and the present. I quickly realized that this project would offer me, a newcomer to the Tri-Cities, a unique chance to become more familiar with country music and the people who have helped it flourish in this area. Looking back, I see that the project has also tied me into local “traditions” of scholarship and cultural celebration and opened up new avenues for understanding and researching music here.

In the early stages of my work, I had the opportunity to consult with scholars involved with previous installments of the project. The first was Roy Andrade, who curated the award-winning *Early History of Country Music in the Tri-Cities* and the second installment, *My Ballad Book*.

Dr. Richard Blaustein, who worked with Dr. Charles Wolfe on this first volume, was an invaluable resource as I planned the direction my research would take. He provided names, ideas, and even took me to an informal country music jam session in Bluff City, Tennessee, that appears in a video that is now part of the kiosk presentation. Blaustein’s role is particularly appropriate in this project, as his innovative use of technology in research and teaching is at the foundation of the regional studies programs that now flourish at ETSU. As I pored through materials in ETSU’s Archives of Appalachia, I uncovered item after item he and his students had collected using early video cameras: footage of performances, interviews, craft demonstrations.

In addition to forging new research methods for documenting local country music practices, Blaustein followed the lead of ETSU professors Dr. Thomas Burton and Ambrose Manning in recognizing the importance of festivals as a way to revive and celebrate these cultural

elements. The Old-Time Country Radio Reunion, which Blaustein organized in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is an example of this sort of community celebration and research opportunity—one we can enjoy and learn from today thanks to the videography of ETSU students from 1981.

I decided to pose the third volume as a continuation of Blaustein and Wolfe's work, naming it *Country Music and Community in the Tri-Cities*. My research began with a focus group of local music-makers who helped me develop a series of topical themes that outline the musical scenes in the region from around 1960 to the present: festivals, informal venues, education, gospel influences, and so on.

Some turns in the research process surprised me. As I searched for ways that people teach and learn country music locally, I discovered a network of education systems: jams and formal and informal lessons by which players pass on their expertise. In addition to academic centers like Mountain Empire Community College and East Tennessee State University, where there are courses of study in country-related music, I learned about music stores and radio shows that have served as forums for teaching instrumental and vocal styles and techniques. Singular figures emerged as magnetic poles of musical know-how—for example, E. C. Miller, who taught

thousands of people to play the banjo.

In conversations with musicians and other music-makers I heard a lot about the importance of media to the growth and development of both the community and sounds of country music in this region. A variety of media forms also brought local country music to larger audiences. While the Down Home Picking Parlor and Coffee House (as it was labeled at its opening in 1976) has served as a local mecca for acoustic music, sounds from that Johnson City stage were broadcast nationwide during the 1980s. Phil Leonard's basement collection of recordings include reel-to-reel tapes of the "Down Home Radio Show" he produced at WETS-FM for national distribution via NPR. Material from a show featuring Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver is included in the "Media" section of the new kiosk volume.

While this project has been one of collection and interpretation, I have been inspired to investigate issues that reach beyond this curatorial venture. John Fleenor, who served as media editor and general advisor for the kiosk, has suggested to me a field for research on local venues for live musical performance. As a musician in the Tri-Cities and Southwest Virginia region, Fleenor saw the "invasion" of disco and the decline of live music in the clubs and nightlife of the area during the 1970s. Revived interest in country-related music such as bluegrass and old-time has led to

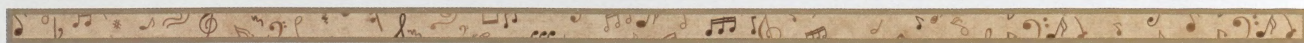
new patterns of consumption. I am now considering a new research project tracing the changing role of performance spaces such as the Down Home, the Red Barn, and a host of newer venues for live performance of country music.

While a large percentage of the kiosk volume's content is centered in the Tri-Cities, I have included some materials from the surrounding region that reveal connections stretching from the border counties of North Carolina through Bristol and up to the neighborhood of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. This range of media materials as well as the voices that speak from the pages of the kiosk indicate the diversity that enlivens the music of the region.

I hope that the kiosk will serve as a continuation of the work started by Blaustein, Burton, Andrade, and many others. I envision the kiosk as another forum to bring together the variety of people for whom country-related music is important, even essential. Bristol's "Birthplace" title indicates how the Tri-Cities are a key part of the territory of country music.

While country music refers to rural space, it also implies community and a concern with *place*: a territory with meaning, with heart, and with connective heartstrings. I hope the new and improved kiosk exhibit will not only teach and inform but will also serve to celebrate these connections. ♦

Lee Bidgood is an assistant professor in the Department of Appalachian Studies at ETSU, teaching courses in Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music Studies.



JEAN THOMAS AND THE AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVAL

JAMES M. GIFFORD

Jean Bell Thomas was a significant yet nearly forgotten figure in the history of Appalachian music. Born Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell in Ashland, Kentucky, in 1881, she graduated from Holy Family School of Business in 1899 and later achieved fame as an author of eight books by national publishing houses, and as a photographer, lecturer, folklorist, and founder and promoter of the American Folk Song Festival. As a young, unmarried woman, she defied many of the conservative conventions of her culture by attending business school and learning stenography. After becoming a court reporter, she traveled by jolt wagon with a circuit judge to courts in the county seat towns in the mountains of eastern Kentucky and earned the sobriquet "The Traipsin' Woman."

Thomas said her family had opposed her taking the job because they "thought it was shocking for a young girl to go traipsin' around the country with a passel of law-men." But she had to have a job and her "heart was set on it."

Thomas saved her court reporter wages and moved to New York, where she spent a decade living a bohemian life in Greenwich Village. In New York, she took writing classes and continued to work as a stenographer. A feminist long before the term was coined, she then held a variety of unconventional jobs, including work as a script girl for Cecil B. de Mille's film *The Ten Commandments*, as secretary to the owner of a professional baseball team, and as press agent for socialite Gloria Gould Bishop and later for Ruby "Texas" Guinan, a notorious entertainer and owner of Prohibition-era speakeasies.

During her early travels in eastern Kentucky, and on subsequent visits, Thomas often carried her camera and



Jean Thomas, circa 1980. Photo courtesy The Highlands Museum & Discovery Center, Ashland, Kentucky.

photographed musicians and other mountain people. With her portable typewriter, she documented lyrics and tunes to ballads. In 1926, Thomas heard James William Day, a blind fiddler, playing and singing in front of the Rowan County Courthouse in Morehead, Kentucky. Thomas signed him to a management contract, changed his name to Jilson Setters, secured a recording contract for Day in 1928 with RCA Victor, and booked him as the "Singin' Fiddler from Lost Hope Hollow" in theaters across America and Europe. Setters eventually played at the Festival of the English Folk Song and Dance Society in London's Royal Albert Hall.

Thomas's most enduring contribution to Appalachian music was the American Folk Song Festival, which she established in 1930. With the exception of the years 1943 to 1947, her old-fashioned Singin' Gatherin' was held at various sites in and around her hometown of Ashland until ill health forced her resignation in 1972. During those four decades, Thomas was the moving force behind the annual music festival. She planned, publicized, and financed it. She collected costumes and musical instruments and booked participants. She even painted directions on roadside boulders to guide motorists to the event.

Thomas's festival was held the second Sunday of June under an open sky on a homemade platform. The event attracted tens of thousands of spectators who sat on fences, the tops of automobiles, and in buggies to hear the old mountain songs and see the old dances. Thomas wanted to showcase traditional music that had originated

in the British Isles and crystalized over more than a century of Appalachian influences into her notion of mountain music.

Part concert and part stage drama, the festival followed a similar script each year. A fox horn that had once belonged to Devil Anse Hatfield announced the beginning of the performance. Then a mountain couple with two children arrived on stage in a covered wagon where they were greeted by a Cherokee woman singing the "Cherokee Song of Welcome." Dialog conveying the settlement of Appalachia was followed by children performing an English country dance. Old songs like "Barbara Allen" were followed by "Old Sally Gooden" played on the mouth harp and "Billy in the Low Ground" played on the fiddle. Musical performances featuring homemade dulcimer, banjo, fiddle, guitar, accordion, harmonica, and recorder were interspersed with more dramatic action like an enactment of an old marriage ceremony or an interpretation of an eighteenth-century murder legend, often featuring Thomas as the narrator. Characters dressed in mountain garb with an historical backdrop that included cultural props such as churns, egg baskets, brooms, drinking gourds, and other manifestations of practical Appalachian art. The festival went through five distinct phases of development that culminated in 1966 when it was moved to Carter Caves State Resort Park, where it became the Sunday afternoon segment of a much broader arts and crafts weekend.

Thomas and her festival were the subjects of both local and national scrutiny. Some scholars, including her Eastern Kentucky

contemporary Cratis D. Williams, questioned the authenticity of her productions. According to folklore scholar Lynwood Montell, many of the leaders of her hometown of Ashland opposed her efforts because they felt her emphasis on the old mountain culture was inconsistent with progressive ambitions of a community that boasted major corporate headquarters and significant business enterprises.

"Jean saw roads, radio, and industry as destructive," Montell observed during a public lecture in Ashland in 1980. "In my subjective evaluation, she was not in favor of Ashland's rapid growth."

The publisher of the local newspaper, Colonel B. F. Forgy, was a vocal detractor of her efforts. Not surprisingly she received little local publicity until 1958 when James T. Norris became editor and publisher of the *Ashland Daily Independent*. Norris, who had a farsighted vision of cultural tourism, recognized the economic potential in the festivals.

Thomas died on December 7, 1982, at age 101 and was buried in her hometown. She had outlived her fame and died not as a local heroine but as an unpopular eccentric. George Wolfford, a respected local journalist, observed that some of the negative opinions about Jean Thomas "were so deep-seated they live on in the second and third generation."

Today, Thomas is an obscure footnote on the pages of history, known to few people outside the scholarly community yet memorialized in several significant ways. Her accomplishments merited detailed recognition by the late Charles K. Wolfe in his book *Kentucky Country*. A fascinating exhibit in Ashland's Kentucky Highlands Museum and

Discovery Center includes photographs and memorabilia that relate to Thomas's life and accomplishments. The University of Louisville's Dwight Anderson Memorial Music Library maintains about sixty boxes of material on Jean Thomas, including thousands of letters, newspaper clippings, programs, diaries, manuscripts, notes, and photographs. According to archivist James Procell, the Jean Thomas collection is currently being digitized, with the "hope that it can be made available online within the next couple of years." Today, Shirley Boyd, a retired educator who is editing Thomas's unpublished, romanticized story of the Hatfields and McCoys, is also writing a much-needed biography of Jean Thomas.

Thomas's amazingly full, and often controversial, life merits examination on other levels, too. Her efforts to preserve the music, dance, and culture of the people of Eastern Kentucky and Central Appalachia served as precursor to popular regional outdoor dramas in Southern Appalachia and provided an informal jump-start to the Appalachian studies movement that began in the 1970s. Thomas's life also should be examined within the context of feminist scholarship. In rhetoric, Thomas did not serve as spokesperson for women's rights and opportunities. She did not overtly "talk the talk," but she clearly "walked the walk." Her life was a testament to seizing opportunities that were normally not available to her female contemporaries. Although she normally stopped short of advocating equal rights and opportunities for the women of Appalachia, she often used mountain music to articulate the problems that Appalachian women regularly encountered. ♦



OLD CROW AND APPALACHIAN SOUL

JENNIFER MCGAHA



Top: Old Crow Medicine Show. Photo courtesy Crackerfarm.

Bottom: The author's great-grandfather (far left), grandfather (center), and uncles, circa 1945. Photo courtesy author.

This past May, my cousin, her boyfriend, and one other young man allegedly wrapped red bandanas across their faces—John Wayne-style—and broke into an occupied home in their native Haywood County, North Carolina. One of the intruders shot the resident of the home in the leg, and now my cousin is in jail awaiting trial on charges of first-degree burglary. She is nineteen years old. Her brother, who is in his early twenties, has already been in prison twice, and between the two of them, they have five children, all by different partners. These

children are mainly cared for by their grandmother and great-grandmother, who is my grandmother's ninety-year-old sister.

My cousins would not have to look back far in their family trees to find stories of close-knit, hardworking families. Their great-great-grandparents, my great-grandparents, raised ten children in a log cabin with no indoor plumbing or electricity. They raised hogs and cattle and grew corn and tobacco and taught their children the value of hard, honest work. Nonetheless, my

cousins reflect some of the painful realities of contemporary Appalachia—reckless, malcontented, drug-addicted youth whose estrangement from their roots has been fueled by lack of opportunities and a loss of connection with the rich culture that shaped their forebears.

It is a reality Diane Sawyer explored in her 2009 exposé on the

hail from Appalachia (bass player Gill Landry is from Louisiana, and guitjo player Kevin Hayes is from Massachusetts) and their audiences reach far beyond the boundaries of the region, they capture the essence of this place and remind us who we are.

In part, it is their style—innovative and edgy and, well, just hard to pin down. They play

are chugging along on a train or grinding sausage, but that's all we get—extended metaphors grand enough to rival T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost.

Like Appalachia herself, Old Crow is multilayered and multifaceted. Songs about spirituality, about a benevolent higher being who feels compassion for the suffering of all people ("I Hear Them All" and "Take

THEY PLAY TRADITIONAL MOUNTAIN INSTRUMENTS—GUITAR, BANJO, HARMONICA, BASS, FIDDLE—IN NEW AND UNEXPECTED WAYS, SIMULTANEOUSLY HONORING TRADITION AND DEFYING CONVENTION.

poverty and alienation and sense of desolation that sometimes exist in rural Appalachia, a reality almost glorified in the documentary which came out that same year, *The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia*. These are, without a doubt, true pictures of life at certain times, in certain places in Appalachia. However, this is not our only reality. We are also creative, clever, playful, innovative, resilient, rich in all the arts—musical, literary, visual, performing—steeped in powerful oral tradition, and for those of us who grew up here, we are constantly struggling to reconcile these contradictory parts of our lives.

No one articulates this conflict of the contemporary Appalachian soul better than Old Crow Medicine Show. When I first heard them play at Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in Asheville back in 2007, they were just on the cusp of becoming really big. I had never even heard of them before that night, but I was instantly captivated by this group that Doc Watson had only recently discovered busking on a street corner in Boone, North Carolina. Although they did not all originally

traditional mountain instruments—guitar, banjo, harmonica, bass, fiddle—in new and unexpected ways, simultaneously honoring tradition and defying convention. They are bluegrass but not in the traditional sense. And they seem a little country, old school country like Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard and George Jones. And they have some of Sam Bush's newgrass attitude as well. At times, they even sound a little bluesy. But the result is greater than any of the individual elements—something fresh and maybe even radical.

With characteristic playfulness and Appalachian subtlety, Old Crow's songs of love and loss are so real you would swear you have met women like "Genevieve" ("with your love like fire and a heart like a guillotine") and "Caroline" and the unnamed women in songs like "Down Home Girl" and "My Good Gal." These songs are both celebrations of life lived fully and laments in the truest tradition of old-time ballads. And like Conway Twitty when he croons, "I want to lay you down," these guys can talk about sex without ever actually mentioning the act at all. They

'em Away") share the stage with songs about hard living. As much as band members like their music to be fun, they do not shy away from the hard stuff. They sing about the realities of this place, the new Appalachia that is struggling to reconcile her past lives with her present one. Old Crow sings about young men going off to war, about poverty and the decline of tobacco farms. And when they sing about parties, about corn liquor and the harder stuff—cocaine and methamphetamines—they don't make it all tight and neat for us.

In the Old Crow world, as in real life, wild parties are fun, an outlet, a release ("Party of the century/ no cops allowed....We got wine, whiskey, women and guns/ How can you afford not to have any fun"). But they do sing about the darker side of drug addiction in songs like "Tennessee Pusher." We get the dark, sensual pull of cocaine in songs like "Down Home Girl": ("I'm going to take you to the muddy river and push you in/ So I can watch the water roll on down your velvet skin/ I'm gonna take you down to New Orleans, down in Dixie land/ So I can watch you do the second line with an umbrella in your hand.")

Finally, just as it is impossible to separate the people of Appalachia from the music that has shaped their collective identity, it is impossible to separate Old Crow from the song that made them famous—"Wagon Wheel." An ode to love and North Carolina, this song, co-written by the band's frontman Ketch Secor and Bob Dylan, has become iconic in the South, especially in North Carolina where we feel a particular joy in having our state capital mentioned by name and where we love the way Ketch says "boo-quet" and not "bow-quet" when he references our state flower.

That night when I first heard Old Crow perform, the entire front of the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium filled with smoke when Ketch sang the line about "catching a trucker out of Philly" and having a "nice, long toke." I was reminded of that this past winter when my husband and I went to see Willie Nelson. Like Old Crow, Willie seems just as comfortable singing about Jesus as he does about drugs and alcohol, and when he sang "Roll Me Up and Smoke Me When I Die," a song he introduced as "a little hymn I wrote,"

the auditorium erupted in cheers.

The audience in Asheville was largely locals, and we locals know a rebel call when we hear it—a call to individualism and innovation and self-sufficiency. It is something that every native Appalachian, even my errant cousins, must feel. After all, we are the region who gave birth to Popcorn Sutton, the moonshiner who steadfastly refused to shut down his still even when he was facing prison time, a stance which, for many of us, became synonymous with the independent spirit of our forebears.

This past May, I once again saw Old Crow perform at Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, but this time, only one or two diehards lit up. Those people were promptly escorted out of the auditorium by security. Apparently, the civic center (now the U.S. Cellular Center) has cracked down on this sort of thing, which may or may not be a good thing, depending on how you look at it. In my book, it's just another example of how we, as a people and a region, are rapidly changing.

We have traded paper mills for craft breweries and gift shops, diners for creperies and bistros, bear

and coon hunting for mountain biking and winery tours. And in the process of this change, some of our people have been left behind, which is why Old Crow is such an important character in the unfolding story of Appalachia. Old Crow takes us on a tour of these mountains and reintroduces us to our people.

In the music of Old Crow, the Appalachian people are no longer flat characters on a page, but real, live, breathing people—people full of humor and convictions, people with gifts and dreams and aspirations, people who have loved and lost, who have fought in wars and who have fought poverty and unemployment and addiction and boredom and displacement, people whose lives cannot be reduced to a New York-based documentary or a three-paragraph story about a nineteen-year-old girl in search of a fix. The music of Old Crow reminds us who we are, and it invites us to begin the difficult business of redefining ourselves on our own terms. In fact, it demands that of us. ♦

Jennifer McGaha's work has appeared in dozens of literary journals and magazines. She teaches at Brevard College and in the Great Smokies Writing Program at the University of North Carolina in Asheville.



MARTIN MUSIC: KEEPING RURAL TRADITIONS ALIVE IN URBAN CENTERS

ANNE CHESKY SMITH



Marcus Martin gained fame as a musician in the mill town of Swannanoa. Photo courtesy author.

Don't ask me how it come to me. I don't know for sure. I guess it was talent, if you would call it that. Just come naturally. All my ancestors were musicians, see, and I guess I took it from them.

Marcus Martin in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 24, 1974

In the midst of the Great Depression, when many Appalachians were losing their hard-won factory jobs and heading back to the farm, Marcus Lafayette Martin moved his family east to Swannanoa, North Carolina, five miles outside Asheville, where he, and later his sons, were able to find work in one of the nation's largest blanket mills, Beacon Manufacturing. Back in Macon County, North Carolina, Martin had farmed and logged but had little experience in industry.

So why was he able to find steady work when so many others were losing their jobs?

According to local legend, Beacon's owner, Charles D. Owen, was fervently against unions, had even moved his entire company brick by brick south from Massachusetts to avoid them, and he figured the best way to stop his workers from trying unionize was to make sure they were happy. In a time before television, when few workers could afford to own a radio or go to the movies, live music



Aerial shot of Beacon Manufacturing. Photo courtesy author.

and sporting events were the major forms of entertainment. So when Owen heard Martin's masterful fiddling, he offered him a job on the spot and his family a place to live in the mill village.

Hiring based on musical talent or other skills unrelated to job performance was not uncommon in the early part of the twentieth century. In fact, two of Martin's sons found steady work at Beacon in part because of their talent on the baseball field. In many parts of the United States, industries hired musicians to form internal musical groups in hopes of promoting enthusiasm and encouraging loyalty among workers.

Even earlier, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Virginians who were looking to buy slaves or acquire servants often specified in advertisements that they wanted a musician because black slaves and white indentured servants composed most of the bands that played local dances.

By the mid-1800s, a fiddler could be found in almost every settlement in Southern Appalachia, including Cherokee communities. As the grandson of musically-inclined Cherokee Indian Chief John Martin (also known as Tsu-ni-tlu-tlu) and a Scots-Irish woman, Martin became inextricably tied to the origins and traditions of western North Carolina music. The contributions he and his family made to the development of these traditions, however, might never have been known if not for an industry looking to appease its workers and keep them from unionizing.

Around the time Martin was born (1881) in the community of Aquone in Macon County, fiddles and other instruments began to be more accessible to the general public through mail-order catalogs. Despite this mass production, many fiddlers, like those in the Martin family, continued to hand-make their own instruments.

Martin's father, Nathaniel "Rowan" Martin, taught him most of his repertoire and technique, and though Rowan himself never found acclaim as a musician, Martin remembered years after his father's death that he "could play the sweetest you ever heard."

Martin began playing publicly in his youth, often fiddling tunes unaccompanied at square dances around Macon and Cherokee counties. Years later, he married Callie Holloway, a "good five-string banjo picker" herself, and they had six children—five boys and a girl. In the 1920s, Martin separated from Callie and moved with his boys—Wade, Fred, Quentin, Wayne, and Edsel—from rural North Carolina to a quickly developing Swannanoa.

Though string bands had been part of the Swannanoa community for at least half a century before Marcus Martin came to town, it was the mill village that created a boom in the quality and quantity of music events in the town. Musicians, rather than being miles apart from each on their farms, were now living in close quarters with hundreds of non-musicians who looked to them for entertainment. It was in the mill town of Swannanoa that Martin became well known as a musician. And so, in Swannanoa and in many mill towns across the Appalachian South, the development of urban industrial centers encouraged the development and simultaneous preservation of traditional music that had most often been associated with rural areas.

A few years after the Martins made their move to Swannanoa, Bascom Lamar Lunsford began organizing the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville. Martin became a favorite of Lunsford's and opened the festival for many years with the traditional tune "Grey

Eagle." He continued to travel and play with Lunsford throughout his life, performing as far away as Renfro Valley, Kentucky, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

In the mid-1940s, recordings of many of Martin's songs were made on old acetate discs and placed in the Library of Congress. Still Martin claimed he "didn't know a thing about music." In reality, he knew dozens of songs by heart and even won the title of "Champion Fiddler" at the 1949 North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh.

Though his music career was taking off, Martin still spent most of his time working as a watchman at the Beacon mill. In his spare time, he made fiddles to sell. He had learned to carve from his father, who "was gifted with wood," according to Martin's son Wade, but who had only used his skills for practical purposes, fashioning plow handles and other farming tools. Carving as an art form came later for the Martin men, when their factory jobs provided them with cash and free time.

Martin made fiddles and mountain dulcimers, always spending extra time to carve a scroll at the end of

each instrument. And though he had stopped playing by the early 1960s, his sons had already learned much from their father. They all played music and carved, but Edsel was the most accomplished. Using only his pocketknife, he shaped likenesses of mountain people, whittled hound dogs, and carved native western North Carolina birds, some of which are now on display in the Smithsonian. The dulcimers Edsel made featured scrolls shaped into human faces, dog heads, and flowers. Musician and friend Billy Edd Wheeler remembered Edsel's playing fondly: "He grew up with these songs, heard them played by his daddy as often as he heard the birds sing, and as naturally."

Beacon Manufacturing began downsizing in the late twentieth century because of increased automation and competition, and the mill permanently closed in 2002. But Marcus Martin's legacy continued.

Today, old-time fiddlers still try to match his style by listening to his recordings. Many of his old-time tunes have been adapted by modern fiddlers, including some of his most unusual songs such as "Lady Hamilton" and "Jenny Run Away in the Mud in the Night."

Beacon's owner Charles D. Owen may have originally viewed Marcus Martin as a tool that could save him time and money by helping keep the mill's workers content, but by hiring Martin and other musicians, Owen also brought the music of rural western North Carolina to a broader audience, many of whom had moved south from Massachusetts with Beacon in the 1920s. Factory jobs not only brought together people who would hear and remember the tunes but also allowed the tradition bearers free time to develop and promote their art. By doing so, these urban areas helped preserve rural traditions of transplanted workers even as these workers abandoned their rural lifestyle.

In 2013, the land that once held the booming industry that brought the Martin family to Swannanoa is being redeveloped, but Martin and his magic hands are still remembered. It is said that he could "fiddle a possum out of a tree, fiddle all the bugs off a sweet potato vine, and fiddle the heart right out of your throat." ♦

Anne Chesky Smith is the executive director of the Swannanoa Valley Museum in Black Mountain, North Carolina.



CARTER SCRATCH

MICHAEL CHITWOOD

Mother Maybelle Carter developed the strumming method known as the "Carter Scratch" to play both the rhythm and melody simultaneously on one guitar.

Deserted Norfolk and Western passenger depot,
T'ang dynasty sun settling on the Blue Ridge,
Roanoke, downtown, Saturday afternoon, late.

Boxcars jangle their hitchings, nervous,
a clatter like orchard ladders, freight scales
adjusting to emptiness, rattle of cattle carriers.

A strapped engine struggles in from coal
country dragging its long sentence of hopper cars,
each part of speech heaped with fossils.

Trinity of Rasta youth dreadlock The Market,
rhythm and melody on one boom box,
dub backtrack from the parked squad car.

Nick name and shop talk, scrim scratch
of the backwater shuffle scuds the lowdown.
Local as it all is, world beat buzzes the vegetable stalls.

Michael Chitwood's eighth book of poetry, *Living Wages*, will be published in 2014 by Tupelo Press. He teaches at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.



LOOKING UP:

THE SAUCEMANS

FRED SAUCEMAN



J.P. and Carl Sauceman. Photo courtesy author.

They were the kings of the ice cream supper. My cousins Carl and J.P. Sauceman most always won the singing contest during these summertime community gatherings, when farmers and their families took a break from their labors to crank ice cream freezers and make music on the grounds of Whittenburg Methodist Church in southern Greene County, Tennessee.

Those well-versed in the history of bluegrass and country music recognize the Sauceman name, but few others do, these days. Most of the brothers' best work—live performances on the radio—is lost to time. Their band broke up in the early 1960s when the illness of Carl's son Jerry called him home, despite an offer from Bill Monroe to join his Blue Grass Boys. The Saucemans had replaced Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs at WCYB radio in Bristol, Virginia, when the duo followed Monroe to stardom.

Music and religion were elemental parts of life for the Sauceman family. For much of the history of the Whittenburg church, a Sauceman had stood behind the pulpit, in this community of German immigrants

near the Nolichucky River. The Sauceman Brothers' uncle Bascom taught shape-note singing schools. Their parents met at a revival. Alvin, their father, was a farmer and minister who made hymn-singing a daily part of the family's routine. He sang for revivals and brush arbor meetings, sometimes staying away from home two weeks or more and returning with canned goods, beans, and potatoes to sustain his family. The Saucemans were popular talent not only at Whittenburg but at ice cream suppers all along a circuit of rural churches.

Alvin hoped his sons would follow him in church work, but instead they heard the call of "hillbilly music" on Victrolas and radios and ringing from the banjo of their half-brother Barney.

The Sauceman Brothers' first venture into secular music was a contest at the Saturday Night Roundup in Asheville, North Carolina. They took second place. "From then on, we were professional musicians," Carl said.

After Carl and J.P. started in radio, on trips home they would ask their father, "Daddy, did you hear us this week?"

"Yeah, son, I heard every song you sang."

"Well, what did you think about it?"

"You ought to be singing those gospel songs."

The place names Carl and J.P. grew up around, Orebank and Bright

the legendary Lowell Blanchard on WNOX and featuring such acts as Kitty Wells, Homer and Jethro, and Johnny Wright.

One day early in 1944, Blanchard called Carl aside and advised him to pursue a job at WCYB radio in Bristol, Virginia. Blanchard predicted

"The band would go out on the town after a performance and spend all their money, while I would go back up to the room and go to bed," Carl recalled. "The next morning we would get up and go to the restaurant. I would order breakfast, and J.P. would say, 'I

"HE WANTED A DOLLAR FOR IT, AND I ONLY HAD NINETY-EIGHT CENTS. HE'S DEAD AND GONE NOW," CARL SAID YEARS LATER. "BUT I STILL OWE HIM TWO PENNIES."

Hope, reflect the opposing forces pulling at the young musicians. They were close to the earth as a sharecropper's sons, but they longed for a life beyond tobacco and cornfields.

Guitars were scarce during the Depression in Greene County, but Carl's nephew had one for sale. "He wanted a dollar for it, and I only had ninety-eight cents. He's dead and gone now," Carl said years later. "But I still owe him two pennies. That guitar stayed around the house, and J.P. picked it up when he was a young kid and frailed on it a lot. He was a natural-born musician because he had that rhythm in him."

On his way to a professional career, Carl and his band played North Carolina schoolhouses, in the daytime when school was in session and also in the evening by kerosene lamps. Admission was fifteen cents. After the split, the band usually pocketed two dollars for the night.

One night after a show, a promoter named Dud Watson came out of the audience and offered Carl a job on WISE radio in Asheville. Soon Watson moved him to WHKY in Hickory. After nearly starving there, Carl and partner Curly Shelton headed for a larger market, Knoxville, Tennessee. They auditioned as the Carolina Ramblers in 1943 and were hired for the "Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round," hosted by

that it was going to be "the hottest station in the country," but Carl's move to this town on the Tennessee-Virginia state line had to wait until he had fulfilled a two-year obligation with the Navy. After passing the physical, he waited nine months before being called up.

In the meantime, he headed back to Asheville to work with Oscar Turner, who had performed with Don Walker and the Blue Ridge Hillbillies. Turner later went on to Hollywood and acted in several cowboy movies.

Ted and Wanda Henderson, known for their work on large border radio stations, had a program on WWNC at the time, and they asked Carl to do some "personals" with them. WWNC later hired him to do a solo program sponsored by Our Billy Boy Flour.

Carl decided he needed a partner and looked no further than his own home and fourteen-year-old brother J.P. He arrived in Bright Hope at midnight one night to get him, waking his father, who reluctantly gave him up with the admonition, "You can have him, if you'll take care of him." Carl agreed, although he was only twenty himself.

They hit the road, with Red Smiley, Fred Smith, Red Rector, and Jimmy Lunsford. J.P.'s innocence immediately showed.

don't believe I want anything.' I would say, 'Come on son, you've got to eat,' and he would say again, 'I don't believe I want anything.' I'd ask him if he had money, and he'd say, 'Oh yeah, yeah, I got money.'

"This went on for several mornings. Finally one morning I said, 'Show me your money. Show it to me.' Needless to say, he didn't have any money. He'd spent it the night before."

Money was always a problem in the early days. While Carl was in the Navy, the group was hired to work the morning show at Renfro Valley, Kentucky, but was barred from doing "personals" at night, causing them to return to Asheville, where they knew people at whose tables they could eat. On the way back to North Carolina they pooled their money and sent Red Rector to buy a pound of bologna and a loaf of bread. The market they stopped at had neither, so Red purchased a large jar of peanut butter. The unhappy crew tossed the full jar behind the car seat. In the middle of the night, rolling through Kentucky, with everyone but the driver asleep, young J.P. located a screwdriver, opened the jar, and consumed all the contents.

"In those days, we were just hunting a place to sing," Carl said, "wherever we could get enough

money to eat on."

In 1946, radio station WGRV signed on the air in the Saucemans' hometown of Greeneville. After service in the Marine Corps and an appearance on the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour" in New York, Claude "Tiny" Day was hired to do a solo show on the new station. Day had been around the music business all his life. His father, Drexel, was a well-known promoter who booked Grand Ole Opry shows. Carl and J.P. were hired to appear with Tiny, who would later marry their sister, Imogene, also a singer and guitar player. The Saucemans stayed at WGRV for almost two years, when meager salaries again forced them to look to Knoxville, where they were hired immediately for an early morning program on WROL by grocer and radio personality Cas Walker. It was Cas who gave the group its permanent name. They had been calling themselves the Hillbilly Ramblers, which people confused with Carl Story's Ramblin' Mountaineers.

According to Carl, "Cas said, 'What do you think about changing the name of your group? Let's call them the Green Valley Boys. You folks are from Greene County, and that'll fit.'"

Every morning at 5:30 Cas greeted the band with a joke. On the air, he would read his advertisement out of the newspaper promoting the weekly specials at the Cas Walker Supermarkets, a chain of grocery stores throughout East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Eastern Kentucky. Cas kept reading the newspaper ads live even when he converted to television.

Carl remembers that Cas always paid his musicians on time. "When payday came, your check was there." Likewise when the Saucemans were preparing to leave



Cas Walker, Carl Sauceman, Tater Tate, and Carl Butler at WROL in Knoxville in the late 1940s. Photo courtesy author.

the show, Cas told Carl: "One thing I want to say: You're the best reliable person that ever worked for me." The "countrified fellow from Sevier County," as Carl described him, never mentioned music. It was the dependability he valued.

The Saucemans worked for another man in Knoxville who would later gain worldwide fame as a country comedian, Archie Campbell from Bulls Gap, Tennessee. Campbell hosted a program on WROL called "The Dinner Bell Round-Up."

In 1949, rumors of big money up north again lured the group away from Tennessee. Carl had heard that the York Brothers, with fiddler Chubby Wise, were "setting them on fire and making all kinds of money in Detroit."

The owner of the first club Carl and J.P. played in the Motor City was appalled when what he called "these Tennessee hillbillies" failed to show up in cowboy suits. Patrons of the club were reluctant to dance to the Saucemans' style of music, so the group moved on to another

club called River Rouge but soon abandoned it as well after playing on a stage protected by chicken wire to shield performers from flying beer bottles. From then on, Carl and J.P. refused to play clubs, north or south.

On a trip back to Tennessee to attend their mother's funeral, the duo discovered that Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs were leaving WCYB. The Saucemans walked into the studios on the ground floor of the General Shelby Hotel in Bristol for an audition and were hired by the 10,000-watt AM station after Flatt, who had worked on the same show with them in Knoxville, told the station manager the Saucemans had the best bluegrass quartet on the road.

Manager Robert Smith, Sr., hired them after issuing a strange warning: "Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you the job. But I want you to know one thing: We can get together around here at WCYB, and we can whip any hillbilly band that comes in here. I want you to know that before you start."

Despite the threat, the Saucemans stayed two years, playing "Farm and Fun Time" six days a week from noon until 2:15. Members of the Carter Family, from nearby Scott County, Virginia, were frequent guests.

The Saucemans left WCYB to take a Saturday night slot on competing station WFHG in Bristol and soon signed their first recording contract with Capitol Records. The band broke up quickly, however, as two members, J.P. and "Tater" Tate, the fiddler, were drafted. Banjo player Larry Richardson accepted an offer to work for Bill Monroe, but Carl turned one down, because of his obligation to Capitol and a commitment he had made to move to Alabama. Although they went their separate ways, eventually all the members of the Bristol band would be reunited in Alabama, where Carl says they did their best work.

Through Drexel Day, Carl had heard about a new radio station in Carrollton, Alabama, that needed a country band. He and J.P. agreed to go there, sight unseen. They would stay in the town of 1,000 people for over sixteen years.

Despite competition from a 50,000-watt station in Birmingham that played similar music, the Saucemans helped WRAG capture ninety-four percent of the listeners in Pickens County. Carl's downhome humor and delivery were patterned after a man he had known at WGRV in Greeneville, Bill Lowery, whose on-air name was Uncle Ebb Brown. Each day before he signed off at noon, Carl would advise his listeners, "Keep looking up, won't you, you'll see more," a line he had picked up from Lowery. Remembering his own upbringing, he would always tell his early afternoon gospel audience, "Don't send your children to church, take them yourself."

Carl remembered having to educate WRAG's station manager about country music. The station was programming music from the World Transcription Library Service, which Carl described as "plumb outdated." He and Tiny Day got permission to drive to Atlanta, where they filled the car with the latest country records. Within weeks, fan mail was pouring into the station, in large sacks from the post office. The station's sales manager positioned Carl in a corner, piled letters around him, and had a picture taken to boost sales.

A number of the Saucemans' 30-minute musical programs on WRAG have been preserved on reel-to-reel tape. Each begins with announcer Gene Maughn saying, "From the studios of WRAG, it's time for 'Farm and Fun Time with Carl Sauceman and The Green Valley Boys.'" It was the same program name that had been used at WCYB in Bristol.

As Carl's father had wished, the band always tried to do at least four gospel songs in every show, interspersed with comedy. A gospel duet with J.P. and Carl singing a sad hymn like "Anywhere is Home" might be followed by "Rabbit on a Log and I Ain't Got No Dog."

For public shows, brother Jack Sauceman donned overalls, "specked up" his face, took an eyebrow pencil to his two front teeth, and sauntered onstage as a hayseed comedian.

"We played every school in the state of Mississippi and filled them two or three times," Carl said. "We made good money, but my child, who only lived thirteen years, took most of it."

The Saucemans can be credited with bringing bluegrass to the deep South. In Alabama and Mississippi, Carl said, audiences were generally unfamiliar with the five-string banjo

until they heard Fred Richardson take off on it.

The band played the rodeo show in Shuqualak, Mississippi, for twenty-two years in a row and the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, for seventeen, alongside the likes of Minnie Pearl. The Fabric Fair Sewing Machine Company and Swartzfager Ford in Meridian asked the Saucemans to do a weekly live television show, which aired on WTOK, Channel 11, from 1953 to 1962. At the same time, they were doing thirty-minute shows in Columbus and Tupelo.

Most of the Saucemans' music fell into two categories: man's relationship to God and man's relationship with women. "Please Be My Love," written by Carl and mandolin player Monroe Fields, was their best-known song, recorded in the early 1960s by George Jones and Melba Montgomery. One of the Saucemans' most popular songs, especially during the Korean War, was a sentimental, patriotic piece called "Wrap My Body in Old Glory When I Go." At the height of their popularity, the band consisted of Carl on rhythm guitar, Fields on mandolin, Fred "Sparkplug" Richardson on banjo, J.P. on bass, and Jim Brock on fiddle.

The Saucemans were always well received when they returned to their hometown in East Tennessee. *The Greeneville Sun* newspaper, where Tiny Day worked for forty-three years as sports editor, held "election parties" using a flatbed truck parked across Main Street as a stage. Thousands would fill the street to hear the latest election returns—faster than the radio stations could report them—interspersed with country music.

"Your love is colder than a



A Greeneville Sun election party, Main Street, Greeneville, Tennessee. Photo courtesy author.

foggy river," Tiny would sing in his rich baritone. An advertisement for an appearance in Gate City, Virginia, referred to him as "Croon King of the Hill-Billies." The song, written by Fred Rose, was Tiny's trademark.

Greeneville's tobacco warehouses, schools, and the VFW auditorium were also frequent sites of Sauceman performances, alongside some of Nashville's most well-known entertainers, brought to town through the Tops of the Opry series. Tiny would catch big-name performers on their way to larger cities and book them at reduced

rates. Loretta Lynn, Bill Anderson, George Jones, and others made their way to Greeneville at Tops of the Opry Shows in the 1960s.

After living in Alabama for sixteen years, Carl was given a permit to construct a new radio station in Gonzales, Louisiana, where he hosted a country music show and learned to make jambalaya from Shot DuPlessis, a Cajun who traveled with the Saucemans when they hit the road to play festivals during the bluegrass revival of the 1970s.

J.P. returned to Greeneville, where he worked as an early morning disc jockey on WSMG radio, taking calls

on the "Trading Post," playing records by entertainers he had met during his own country music career, and unsuccessfully attempting to disguise his voice as Santa Claus when reading children's letters over the air every December.

J.P. died in 1984 and Carl twenty-one years later. Until the end of their days, both of the brothers followed the optimistic advice Carl used at the end of his daily broadcasts: "Keep looking up, won't you, you'll see more." ♦

Fred Sauceman, a former country disc jockey, is editor of *Now & Then*.



THE JOHNSON CITY SESSIONS: A STORY WHOSE TIME HAS COME

WAYNE WINKLER



Cover of the Johnson City Sessions box set. Photo courtesy Bear Family Records.

They say lightning rarely strikes in the same place twice, but in the fall of 1928, Columbia Records hoped to catch a bolt or two of the voltage found by the competing Victor Talking Machine Company in northeast Tennessee the previous summer. In July and August of 1927, Victor producer Ralph Peer conducted the first of the legendary “Bristol Sessions” in the state line town of Bristol, Tennessee. Widely hailed as “the Big Bang of Country Music,” these recording sessions, held in a hat warehouse using regional musicians, yielded the first superstars of country music, Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, and proved the commercial viability of what was then known as “hillbilly” music. Columbia wanted a piece of the action.

By the time Columbia producer Frank B. Walker arrived in Johnson City, Tennessee, Peer was already preparing to make a second trip to Bristol. So Walker got busy scouting out the talent that Peer had missed—or that had missed Peer. And what Walker found is in many ways more eclectic and interesting to modern ears than those historic and influential Bristol recordings.

The latest box set collection from Germany’s Bear Family Records, *The Johnson City Sessions, 1928 – 1929*, documents the work of Walker and is as meticulously produced and documented as its predecessor, *The Bristol Sessions, 1927 – 1928*. Dr. Ted Olson of East Tennessee State University’s Department of Appalachian Studies, who initiated and produced *The Bristol Sessions*, has done the same for the lesser-known Johnson City recordings. As with the Bristol set, he and British country music scholar Tony Russell have composed a lavish 136-page book detailing every aspect of the sessions, including background, biographies of the performers, a day-by-day session log, lyric sheets, and discographies. And, of course, photographs—of the performers, of Walker, and of Johnson City in the 1920s.

“I had worked with Charles Wolfe, the esteemed country music historian, on a book called *The Bristol Sessions*,” Olson recounts. “Charles and I included a short chapter on the Johnson City Sessions at the end of the book called “The Rest of the Story” because in some ways the Johnson City Sessions are the rest of the story

of the Bristol Sessions. After that chapter was put in the book, some people became more interested in this other part of the Bristol Sessions saga. At first, people focused on the Bristol Sessions proper because they're so important, so legendary. They produced the Carter Family,

as a producer, he brought blues singer Bessie Smith to the label and produced the first commercial recordings of Cajun music. But his first love was country music, and he worked with performers including Gid Tanner, Riley Puckett, Charlie Poole, and Vernon Dählhart.

would take modern communication to spread the word about the sessions and modern transportation to get the musicians to the studio.

Walker placed an ad in the *Johnson City Chronicle* on October 3, 1928, with the headline "Can You Sing or Play Old Time Music?" The

WE REALLY HAD TO GET CREATIVE TO FIND OUT WHO THESE PEOPLE WERE, WHERE THEY CAME FROM, WHY THEY CAME TO JOHNSON CITY, AND HOW THEIR RECORDS SOLD.

Jimmie Rodgers, and many other country music greats. The Johnson City Sessions, on the other hand, didn't produce musicians with that kind of public name recognition, so people tended to overlook them at first. But once the *Bristol Sessions* box set was put out in 2011, that same label expressed an interest in releasing this 'rest of the story,' *The Johnson City Sessions*."

Olson and Russell had to start from scratch; practically no research had been done previously on these sessions or on the musicians. "We really had to get creative to find out who these people were, where they came from, why they came to Johnson City, and how their records sold. What were the rest of their creative lives like? Did they continue to play music after they disappeared into obscurity?"

The least obscure figure connected with *The Johnson City Sessions* was the producer, Frank Buckley Walker. Raised on a farm in Fly Summit, New York, he left a career on Wall Street to serve in World War I. After the war, he took a job with Columbia Records, first learning the technical aspects of record-making, then branching off into artist management with acts like Enrico Caruso and Arturo Toscanini. Returning to Columbia

Walker later left Columbia for RCA, where he created the budget Bluebird label and released classic jazz and swing recordings by Glenn Miller ("String of Pearls"), Coleman Hawkins ("Body and Soul"), and Duke Ellington ("Take the 'A' Train"). But Walker is probably best remembered for an artist he signed after moving to MGM Records: Hank Williams, dubbed by Walker "the hillbilly Shakespeare." Walker retired in 1958 and died in 1963.

The selection of Johnson City as a recording site was inspired partly by its proximity to Bristol as well as the hope that the region might have yet other undiscovered stars of the caliber of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. But in 1928, Johnson City had surpassed the older, more established Bristol in population; by 1930, Johnson City would be home to more than 25,000 people, making it the fifth largest city in Tennessee. Three railroads intersected there: the Clinchfield, the Southern, and the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Johnson City was becoming a manufacturing center; it was also a hub for the distribution of illicit whiskey, earning the city the title "Little Chicago." Johnson City was modern. And while the goal of the Columbia recording sessions was to collect traditional country music, it

ad was repeated in the *Chronicle* and in another local paper, the *Staff-News*, over the next several days. On October 12, the *Staff-News* printed a press release about the auditions which would be held the next day. The ad was rediscovered in the early 1970s by Russell when he was editing the pioneering British-based magazine *Old-Time Music*. But another forty years would pass before the significance of that ad and the full story of the Johnson City Sessions would be told.

The 1928 sessions were held at the Marshall Brothers Lumber Company, 312-314 East Main Street. Today, that site is Colonial Way, a street between Nelson Fine Arts and WJHL-TV. An historical marker commemorating the sessions was erected on WJHL's front lawn at a ceremony in the spring of 2013.

The book included in the box set documents the chronology of the sessions, for which Olson credits the late Charles Wolfe, who had investigated what remained of the Columbia recording logs and field notes for the sessions.

"Some of that information was recorded incorrectly by Columbia," says Olson. "So part of our task was sifting through the bare bones minimum information we had about the Johnson City Sessions and determin-



The Roane County Ramblers promotional photo, circa 1929 (left to right): Luke Brandon (guitar), Jimmy McCarroll (fiddle), Howard Wyatt (banjo), John Kelly (mandolin). Photo courtesy David Freeman.

ing which of the names were accurate and which had been inaccurately transcribed. Once we had the name, we had to locate the family members and work through secondary sources, namely family members who remembered people, because the last living participant, Pauline Bowman, had died in 2003. And to find these people wasn't easy. But we put ads and articles in papers all over the Appalachian area, in eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina, and of course, East Tennessee. And lo and behold, people started calling us and writing us from out of the blue, saying 'We saw this article in the paper and we'd like to tell you about our ancestors who played at the Johnson City Sessions.' So Tony Russell and I just started to gather the stories over the last fifteen months based on this very rudimentary technique of getting the word out, and we were able to get some wonderful stories."

Some of the performers at the Johnson City Sessions had recorded for Ralph Peer at the Bristol Sessions.

The Grant Brothers, Jack and Claude, had, along with Jack Pierce, been Jimmie Rodgers' backing band, but Peer separated them and recorded the band as the Tennesse Ramblers. Walker recorded Jack and Claude Grant, Pierce, and Claude Slagle as the Grant Brothers. Their recording "When a Man is Married/Tell It to Me" was the first disc Columbia released from the Johnson City Sessions, in January of 1929. McVay & Johnson, B. F. Shelton, and Ellis Williams had also recorded for Peer in Bristol before coming to Johnson City to record for Walker; neither Walker nor Columbia had a problem with that. Nor did they mind recording performers who had previously recorded for other labels, like Clarence Ashley, Charlie Bowman, and Byrd Moore.

None of the performers at the Johnson City Sessions lived in Johnson City. The closest were Charlie Bowman and other members of the Bowman family, who had lived nearby in Gray Station but had moved to

Bristol by 1929. Uncle Dick Decker was also more or less local, from Washington County, Tennessee. The Grant Brothers were from Bristol. Most of the performers were from nearby counties in East Tennessee or western North Carolina, but some performers traveled a considerable distance to be there. The Proximity String Quartet and the Greensboro Boys Quartet at the 1928 sessions and the Bentley Boys at the 1929 sessions came from the Burlington-Greensboro area of North Carolina. Southern West Virginia musicians at the sessions included Richard Harold from Princeton and Roy Harvey, Leonard Copeland, Vernal Vest, Robert Hoke, and the Weaver Brothers from the area around Beckley. And a sizable contingent of musicians was rounded up by Dewey Golden, a music store owner and performer in Corbin, Kentucky. The contingent included B. F. Shelton, George Roark, McVay & Johnson, The Hodges Brothers and Quartet, Bailey Briscoe, The Garland Brothers & Grinstead, and The Holiness Singers.

The biggest commercial hit of the Johnson City Sessions was a tune by Roy Harvey, who had worked with Walker since 1926 when Harvey had joined Charlie Poole's North Carolina Ramblers. Changing his name slightly to Roy "Harper," he teamed with Earl Shirkey to record "Steamboat Man/When the Roses Bloom for the Bootlegger," which sold over 70,000 copies and made the entire Johnson City project profitable.

Another song from the 1928 sessions that is well known today is "Johnson City Blues" by Clarence Greene, from Cranberry in what is now Avery County, North Carolina. Greene had recorded

for Columbia in Atlanta in 1927. "Johnson City Blues" is essentially a re-working of Ida Cox's "Chattanooga Blues." Two weeks after recording this number in Johnson City, Greene would record for Ralph Peer and the Victor company in Bristol. By 1931 Greene would be recording in New York City for the Brunswick label.

Charlie Bowman and his Brothers' "Roll on Buddy" would become a future bluegrass classic, while Bill and Belle Reed's version of the British ballad "The Old Lady and the Devil" would be chosen by folklorist Harry Smith for his landmark 1952 LP collection *Anthology of American Folk Music*. And the Grant Brothers' take on the Civil War song "Johnson Boys" was transcribed in the influential 1960s publication *The New Lost City Ramblers Song Book* and covered by several groups, including Flatt and Scruggs and the Weavers.

Frank Walker returned to Johnson City in October of 1929 for more recordings. Olson was able to confirm the location of that session by talking to Bob Cox, a Johnson City historian and member of the Bowman family. After talking with family members and discussing evidence, Cox and Olson determined that the sessions took place in a utility building that today is part of the West Main Street Christian Church.

For the October 21-24, 1929, sessions, no newspaper announcements were made; Walker apparently relied solely on established contacts. Two of the performances recorded that week were included in Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*: Clarence Ashley's "The Coo-Coo Bird" and "Down on Penny's Farm" by the Bentley Boys.



Byrd Moore & His Hot Shots, circa 1929 (left to right): Byrd Moore (guitar), Clarence Greene (fiddle), Clarence Ashley (guitar). Photo courtesy Charles K. Wolfe Collection.

Clarence Ashley had recorded as a member of Byrd Moore and His Hot Shots earlier on that Wednesday, October 23, but proved to be more memorable as a solo performer. Born in Bristol, Virginia, Clarence "Tom" Ashley grew up in Johnson County, Tennessee, learned the banjo, and began playing in a medicine show at the age of sixteen. (Later, he would be asked to train a newly-hired medicine show employee, future country music star Roy Acuff.) By the mid-1930s he no longer recorded, but in the 1940s and '50s sometimes worked with Charlie Monroe and the Stanley Brothers. The folk music revival of the 1950s revitalized his musical career, and folklorist Ralph Rinzler produced two LPs of informal concert recordings featuring Ashley and some of his friends, one of whom was a then-unknown blind guitarist named Arthel "Doc" Watson. Ashley continued to perform until his death in 1967. "The Coo-Coo Bird" was his signature song, and it has been performed and recorded by countless musicians.

The Bentley Boys are an obscure group. Frank Walker, interviewed by Mike Seeger in 1962, could not remember anything about the group. Olson and Russell tracked down a possible member, Clement Bentley of Greensboro, North Carolina, but nothing is definitive. The song "Down on Penny's Farm" recounts the difficulties of sharecroppers and was also included on the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, where it was heard by a generation of folk musicians. The song served as the obvious model for an early Bob Dylan song, "Hard Times in New York Town," as well as his later "Maggie's Farm."

Other notable recordings from the 1929 sessions include the Moatsville String Ticklers' version of a West Virginia state song, "West Virginia Hills"; the Bowman Sisters' "Lonesome Blues" featuring accordion by Fran Trappe; and a guitar duet with Roy Harvey, this time teamed with Leonard Copeland for "Beckley Rag." "Buttermilk Blues" is one of two harmonica tunes done by the only African American partici-

pant in either Johnson City session, Ellis Williams.

As Olson writes, "The Johnson City Sessions were well-timed in terms of documenting certain musicians and regional sounds—and ill-timed in that they were unknowingly conducted on the brink of the Great Depression." Unfortunately, the final day of the Johnson City Sessions, October 24, is remembered as "Black Thursday," when stock prices plummeted and 12.9 million shares were sold, double the previous record. Prices recovered that afternoon and the market closed on an upswing. But four days later, on Monday, October 28, prices dropped again as investors tried to get out of the market. This time no one came in to save it. The next day is infamous as "Black Tuesday," October 29, 1929, the worst day in stock market history. Many investors lost their entire savings, companies were ruined, and the Great Depression began.

Of course, the recordings made during the 1929 sessions did not sell well; indeed, many were not even released. But this had nothing to do with the quality of the music. The bottom had simply dropped out of the market.

Ralph Peer's historic sessions in Bristol proved the commercial viability of country music and created

its first two superstars, the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. Music historian Nolan Porterfield coined the term "The Big Bang of Country Music," and Johnny Cash went further, calling the Bristol Sessions "the single most important event in the history of country music." But Ted Olson contends there is much about the music on *The Johnson City Sessions* that has been overlooked by the impact of the Bristol Sessions. Indeed, as *The Bristol Sessions* box set proves, there was much in the Bristol Sessions themselves that had been overshadowed by the fame of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers.

But Olson contends that while Peer was interested primarily in capturing vocal performances of sacred and secular songs with an eye toward attracting the broadest possible audience, Frank Walker had a more "hands-off, open tent approach," one which reflected his eclectic tastes and his sense of humor. As a result, the Johnson City recordings may reflect more of the music that could be heard in that time and place.

"The Johnson City Sessions are important because, in my opinion, they show Appalachian music in the widest possible variety at the cusp of the Great Depression," Olson writes. "And I think that's important because the music that sold during

the Great Depression tended to be more commercial—music done by higher caliber musicians who had just a singular sound that could be marketed during lean times, such as Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, and then of course the western singers, the cowboy singers: Gene Autry, the Sons of the Pioneers, who came on strong in the 1930s. That music is very professional, and some would say slick, on some level. The music on *The Johnson City Sessions* is that last bastion of traditional music finding voice in a mass media environment, marketed through commercial apparatus, through record stores and such."

Certainly, as the Great Depression was followed by World War II, Appalachia and its music would never be the same. Frank Walker's recordings give us that final glimpse of Appalachian music before the changes came. As Olson points out, "Three of the strongest recordings on Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* were recorded in Johnson City in 1928 and 1929."

"It's a quieter story," says Olson. "It's a story that has gotten a lot less attention than the Bristol Sessions. But it's a story whose time has come." ❖

Wanye Winkler is director of radio station WETS-FM/HD on the campus of East Tennessee State University.



A RADIATOR SHOP TRANSFORMED:

SITE OF 1929 JOHNSON CITY SESSIONS SPEAKS OF ERA'S RACE RELATIONS

JEFF KEELING



West Main Street Christian Church annex (center), formerly Rowe Radiator Shop. This building is considered the site of the 1929 Johnson City Sessions. Photo by Randy Sanders.

Like the strings and harmonies in the music itself, the undertones surrounding Frank Walker's recording sessions of "hillbilly music" in Johnson City in 1928 and 1929 are complex and varied. Those complex undertones were evident eighty-four years after the final recording, when music historian Ted Olson and church member Jerome Manuel sat talking in the annex of West Main Street Christian Church on a steamy August afternoon. The annex had been constructed in 1928 by Roland Arwood, a white laborer. By the 1930s it was home to Rowe Radiator Shop, a well-known auto landmark on West Main up through at least the mid-1940s.

Olson is convinced that within those walls—where today songs of praise and acts of service to the community emanate from the historically African-American but now integrated church—Columbia Records producer Frank Walker recorded roughly five dozen songs, more than half the total output of the

Johnson City Sessions. Olson didn't reach his conclusion about the 1929 recording location until early 2013, as part of research for the Johnson City Sessions box set. Along with revealing the recording site, which at the time was a separate building not affiliated with the church, his research provoked thoughts about race, music, and Appalachian culture, and whether the late 1920s music scene may have been, at least informally, ahead of its time when it came to race relations.

"The very last performer in 1929 at this particular site was the only African American performer of either year in the Johnson City Sessions—kind of a subtle irony," Olson said, referring to a man who played harmonica and "bones" under the name Ellis Williams at the 248 West Main Street location.

The musical similarities between "hillbilly" style and blues, the probable willingness of performers of different races to make music together, and even the location in a section of town that was far from lily white all suggest to

Olson that, at least subtly, the power of music was working in unexpected quarters.

"It seems to underscore at the very least that there was a lot of cultural borrowing and musical respect back and forth, even if the official culture was one of Jim Crow segregation."

Several factors reinforce the idea that racial lines may have been blurred during the hillbilly recording sessions of the late '20s. Some songs from the 1929 recordings found their way back into circulation during the folk music revival that began in the 1940s. That movement included a strong element of racial integration. Additionally, Clarence Greene, a fiddler from North Carolina who played in the 1929 sessions (and who is alleged to have once bested Jimmie Rodgers in a guitar-picking contest) may have picked up a lick or two from native Texan Blind Lemon Jefferson, an African American country blues guitarist. One of Greene's contemporaries, Walter Davis, recollected that he and Greene both advanced their guitar skills by watching Jefferson play on the streets of Johnson City in the early 1920s.

Whatever degree of truth there may be in the notion that the music scene subtly subverted the race-based mores of the day, Jerome Manuel was just pleased to hear that his home church has one more piece

of history surrounding it. West Main Street Christian is Johnson City's oldest standing church. Its founder, Hezekiah Hankal, was a prominent African American Johnson Citian who worked as an attorney, a doctor, served on the city council, and—also on church property—started the first primary school for African American children in Johnson City. Today, the church has a white minister and a racially mixed congregation, having integrated sometime in the 1980s, according to Manuel. Congregants serve meals and spread God's love to the less fortunate (mostly white) who attend the weekly "Loaves and Fishes" program on Saturdays.

The numerous back stories leave ample opportunity for conjecture about music, race, and culture in Johnson City circa 1929, something Olson finds appealing.

"These things we've learned explain the context of the recording. There was this kind of myth that African American and white music were quite segregated in the 1920s, and a story like this suggests there was a lot of intermingling of performers, and perhaps active sharing."

Olson said the two songs by the African American harmonica player Ellis Williams that Walker recorded on West Main Street were issued as "race" records (marketed to African

American audiences) "but don't sound that different from a couple of blues recordings that were done by whites and marketed as 'hillbilly' [targeted toward white audiences]." Additionally, Tony Russell is convinced that "Ellis Williams" is the same musician as an "L. Watson" who was the only African American musician to record at the Bristol Sessions.

In Bristol, Watson/Williams "played a harmonica tune that sounded very similar to a solo by a white performer, Henry Whitter." And, Olson said, a number of the songs recorded by "hillbilly" artists at the Johnson City Sessions were influenced by African American musical styles. A few had the word "blues" in their titles, notably Clarence Greene's "Johnson City Blues," which Olson said is particularly influenced by African American blues guitar style.

"Knowing about this site for these important hillbilly sessions and its connections to Johnson City's African American community really underscores that things were more nuanced than they may have seemed on the surface.

"It's also very important for community pride today that we know as much as we can about these sessions, because they suggest that all Johnson Citians played a part in them." ♦

Jeff Keeling is a freelance writer living in Johnson City, Tennessee.



VIRGIL AND RAYFORD: CREATING LOCALLY GROWN MUSIC FROM ORGANIC INGREDIENTS

JULIA WATTS



Virgil (left) and Rayford (right) pose for the camera. Photo courtesy author.

It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to claim that I grew up in a bilingual home. I can't truly make this claim, however, because the two languages I absorbed as a child were both forms of English. The first language, the one my parents grew up with and my grandparents still spoke, was the language of the hills and hollers, of the cow fields and coal mines, a language full of "aint's" and double negatives that sometimes became triples and homeruns. The second language was the one my parents had learned as readers, as citizens of the larger world, and as first-generation college students. This was the language of the literature textbooks that were always lying around the house and of the novels Mom and I would check out during our weekly trips to our little local library.

In our house, these two Englishes were never framed in terms of wrong and right. They were both valid forms of expression. Which one you used depended on the story you needed to tell. For example, Papaw Queener's

story about how his grandmother ended up riding a cow after falling over it in a dark field definitely lent itself best to mountain English. A story by James Agee, however, was best expressed through "book-smart" English.

With these vivid languages and stories—both oral and written—swirling around in my young brain, it's no wonder I grew up to be a writer. What is a wonder is that on his sixty-ninth birthday, my dad, Rayford Watts, became a writer, too.

He had dabbled in writing before—a poem here, a short story there—but his job as the chair of the English department at Cumberland College (now the University of the Cumberlands) demanded a great deal of his time, and his primary creative outlet was Paint Creek Pottery, the successful business he still shares with my mom. But retirement turned into his creative renaissance. A lifelong fan of traditional country and bluegrass music, he was able to devote more of his time to guitar lessons with longtime family friend Virgil Bowlin, a former member of

Larry Sparks' Lonesome Ramblers. Soon the songs my dad was hearing in his head were not just songs that had been passed down through generations but also songs that were waiting to be written. The first song that came to him was on his sixty-ninth birthday in October of 2009.

all run straight/ It's the Walmart in heaven, hurry up now don't be late!

At his next music lesson, Dad played "Walmart in Heaven" for Virgil. He was impressed, and a collaboration was born. More

themes in Dad's songwriting. In the liner notes, he writes, "This CD comprises songs about evolving life in Eastern Kentucky from the days of the early independent settlers to the coal-mining era, to the well-intentioned war on poverty, to the coming of the technology age,

AS THE TITLE IMPLIES, THE ALBUM OFTEN DEALS WITH THE INEXTRICABLE AND SOMETIMES PAINFUL CONNECTION BETWEEN EASTERN KENTUCKY AND THE COAL-MINING INDUSTRY.

He says, "The first song I ever wrote was 'Walmart in Heaven.' It came about during a trip to Walmart. I was looking for an item that I could have sworn was in the place I was looking just the week before. Two young women, each with a tiny baby, had the aisle blocked with their piled-high buggies. I heard one of the girls say, 'I just love coming to Walmart.' The other said, 'I do, too. It's just like heaven to me.' Those words made me wonder how a Walmart in heaven might be different from the hellish one I was standing in."

"Walmart in Heaven" was created in the style of a peppy Southern gospel number, the kind that might have been sung in four-part harmony by the Happy Goodman Family, but with lyrics that are decidedly tongue-in-cheek:

There's a place away up yonder
that I'm longing to see/
The parking lot is smooth and wide—
there's room for you and me/
With Ol' Roy at the portal,
wagging welcome,
pilgrim home/
It's the Walmart in heaven
where we never more shall roam.

Chorus: Walmart in heaven,
oh how happy we shall be/
Everyday low prices, satisfaction
guaranteed/
Where Saint Peter is the greeter
and the cart wheels

songs were born, too, and found their way onto the CD *Virgil Sings Rayford*, produced at Virgil's Peerless Mountain Recording Studios, the site of an old coal camp. With the production of *Virgil Sings Rayford*, a pattern was set: Dad would write the lyrics and melody and bring them to Virgil, who would help with the arrangements. When recording time came, Virgil's rich tenor would supply the vocals, and both he and Dad would play guitar. Dad turned out to be a prolific songwriter in the mind-boggling way that Joyce Carol Oates is a prolific novelist, and now, four years after *Virgil Sings Rayford*, the duo is at work on a fifteenth album. They have also developed a loyal local following in Eastern Kentucky and East Tennessee, which has led to gigs at the University of the Cumberlands' Homecoming and the Mountain Heritage Festival.

Obviously, as the daughter of one-half of Virgil and Rayford, I'm in no position to write an unbiased review of their latest album *Camp House Blues*; however, my unique position does afford me the opportunity to put the songs on the album in context of my dad's values, background, and region. *Camp House Blues*, a compilation of new material and some older songs, including "Walmart in Heaven," serves as an excellent introduction to the

and to the Walmartization of the region."

The songs are in the language of the hills and hollers but use book-smart literary techniques. Many of them work as persona poems, with the "I" in the song as a fictional narrator created through a combination of observation, experience, and imagination. Dad says, "I try to occupy the head of the narrator and see the world from his limited or insightful perspective."

As its title implies, the album often deals with the inextricable and sometimes painful connection between Eastern Kentucky and the coal-mining industry. "Miner's Wife" shows a woman's sadness at leaving the family farm to make a life in a coal camp, and "Company Man" explores how, for the coal-camp-dwelling man, mining was often not just his livelihood but the sum total of his identity. Though the song chronicles the immediate and long-term dangers of coal mining and the "economic abuse" innate in the coal camp system, the narrator tells us, "As black lung was taking my daddy's last breath, he spoke for himself and all his friends/ Cut-shin, McRoberts, and Heron—I'd work at all them places again."

The environmental impact of contemporary mining is criticized

in "Holding On" (this one with vocals by Dad instead of Virgil), in which a mountaintop landowner is determined not to relinquish his property:

They'd move me off this
mountaintop/ But I'm holding
on with all I've got/ They've
filled the creek and cut down
all the trees/ That bottomland
we had in tillage/ Is fallen
now to blade and pillage/ I'm
holding on, but I can feel it
slipping away.

While some of the songs about contemporary topics describe the

economic depression and environmental devastation of Appalachia, others are more upbeat, showing how technology and globalization have brought the world to a people who used to live in isolation. In "Cable Up Our Holler," the farmer narrator tells us, "I once was a fool, just dumb as a hammer/ Didn't know nothin' 'bout the world out yander/ The world was big but now it's smaller/ Since we got cable up our holler."

In the funny, poignant "Sue and Javier," the speaker at first expresses his trepidation about the fact that his sister has married a Mexican. Over the course of the song, however, he

and the rest of his family come to accept Javier and count him as one of their own. It doesn't hurt, of course, that Javier is a talented guitar picker and decorates his pickup truck with a "Friends of Coal" bumper sticker.

The songs of *Camp House Blues* don't shy away from the troubles of Eastern Kentucky's past and present, but they also celebrate the spirit of the region: the love of the land, the bonds of family and community, and the kind of do-it-yourself independent spirit that would lead a man to launch a songwriting career on his sixty-ninth birthday. ❖

Julia Watts is a native of southeastern Kentucky. Her new book, *Secret City*, is a young adult novel set in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, during the Manhattan Project.



THE CIGAR BOX GUITAR

MARGARET NAVA

Gramps lived in an antiquated one-room house trailer about a mile down the road from our farm in West Virginia. Even though he lived closer to the hardtop than we did, he had neither electricity nor running water. Inside the trailer, a blackened wood stove cooked his food and warmed the room. Other than an Army cot, a kerosene lamp, and an old rocking chair, there was little in the way of furniture.

The way Gramps saw it, if he couldn't grow, trap, or barter for something, he probably didn't need it. His only guilty pleasure was cigars, usually given to him as birthday or Christmas presents. When the cigars had all been smoked, the boxes they were packed in were recycled into something useful. Some stored herbs. One, hidden under his cot, contained treasures discovered in the woods. Others were transformed into unique jewelry boxes and lamps that were sold at the local flea market.

Every Saturday night most of the neighbors in the hollow headed down to my grandfather's place for a sing-a-long of hymns and old-time music. Although one of the neighbors offered the use of his guitar, Gramps preferred using his own instruments. His favorite was a three-stringed guitar. Crafted from an old cigar box, the instrument sounded unlike anything I had ever heard. Somehow, its tone was pure and harmonic. Every time I listened to Gramps play "Pretty Polly," "The Wreck of the Old 97," or "The Old Rugged Cross," I was taken back



Photo courtesy reddoguitars.com.

to another time, and I asked him to show me how to make a cigar box guitar.

"Do you smoke cigars?" he asked.

"No," I replied.

"Well, then, guess you're gonna have to use one of mine."

Taking a box from his stash, Gramps cut a round hole in the middle of the box, drilled three holes in the top of a three-foot plank, attached a nut, a bridge, and three tuning pegs to the plank, and then glued the entire assembly to the underside of the cigar box lid. As he worked, the scent of tobacco and wood glue filled the small trailer.

After letting everything set overnight, Gramps strung three pieces of screen wire between the bridge and pegs and began to tune the guitar. At first, it sounded more like a squeaky door than a musical instrument, but within a few minutes, Gramps was tapping his foot and belting out a tune.

He spent the better part of a summer trying to teach me chords and how to strum, but no matter how hard I tried, I never got the knack of it. "Three Blind Mice" was the best I could do.

The following winter, my husband was offered a job in Chicago, we sold our farm, and I never again played my cigar box guitar. Several years later, we got word that Gramps had died from lung cancer. At his funeral, one of our old neighbors played "Amazing Grace," on a cigar box guitar. ♦



Margaret Nava's most recent book is *Along the Pocatalico*.



FIDDLING AT MIDNIGHT'S FARMHOUSE

CLYDE KESSLER

I tease some old music from a fiddle
more squall than riff, more dust than strings,
and a rosined bow. I hear it turn the house
into children and dreams. A slow ballad
almost plays itself home and cold to the door
where nobody waits, and I'm all whiskey
and wobbly enough to sing myself a ghost.

Fall to the fiddle, I say, draw its bow,
slide it like moonlight, as if somebody loves
and keeps the world. There's a singer's burden
shuffled in the chords, and you sing it near.
If you're this ghost, I'll play the song again.
It laughs from cherry-wood, it shrugs a stone
like clouds on an eye, never makes heaven.

Clyde Kessler works in the library at Virginia Tech. He is a founding member of Blue Ridge Discovery Center, an environmental education organization in southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina.



BLACKTOPS AND CHEATING SONGS

JUDY LEE GREEN



The author's parents, Ed and Levida Bingham Lee. Levida dreamed of going to Texas and seeing real cowboys. Photo courtesy author.

It was hot. The temperature must have been at least a hundred degrees. The inside of the car was like a brick oven, and the seven of us were like corn sticks in a baking pan.

"Mama, make him get over!"

"I only got this much room!"

"Mama, can I sit by the window the next time we stop?"

"How much further is it to Texas anyway?"

"Why do they call them Dog Days?"

"Daddy, can we stop at the next roadside park and have some Kool-Aid? I'm thirsty."

We had left East Tennessee the previous day at dawn. The luggage rack atop our 1949 Plymouth was loaded with cardboard suitcases and corrugated boxes. They held most of the clothes we owned.

Inside the trunk were pork and beans, saltine crackers, Vienna sausages, Treet and potted meat, a loaf of white bread, a jar of mustard, boxes of cereal, potato chips, MoonPies, and other non-perishable items. We had a thermos of ice water and a jug of Kool-Aid. We had pillows and quilts and light blankets and a spare tire and tools in case the car broke down. Our daddy had also brought his

carpenter tools, for he didn't feel dressed without them.

We were on our way west. To Texas. To see cowboys and oil wells. And cowboys and jack rabbits. And cowboys and wide-open spaces. And cowboys. My mama had dreamed of going to Texas for years, like other women dream of fur coats and diamond rings. Texas was the great American dream, synonymous with the west where guns and guitars had equal power.

We played games to pass the time. Our favorites were I See Something You Don't See and Coffeepot. We counted cows and laughed hysterically each time Daddy greeted a herd with a droll, "Hello girls."

We counted cars that weren't black and out-of-state license plates and screamed and waved in delight when we passed another Tennessee car. Daddy blew the horn.

We eagerly watched for Burma Shave signs along the blacktop highways. Those of us who could read recited in unison: "I know he's a wolf/ said Red Riding Hood/ but grandma dear/ he smells so good/ Burma Shave."

There was no radio in the car so we sang songs. Mama had purchased a fifteen-cent country and western songbook especially for the trip. Once we had gotten underway, she produced it like a magician pulling a rabbit

out of a hat. Books and magazines were a luxury in our family, and the songbook was almost as much of a treat as our very first vacation.

Five little voices—three male, two female, ages four to eleven—sang from the mountains of East Tennessee to the West Tennessee flatlands, through the Mississippi Delta, across the Mississippi River and through the state of Louisiana as we made our way to Texas on the two-lane blacktops of the early 1950s.

"I didn't know God made honky-tonk angels," our voices sang as we passed honky-tonks sleeping in the Southern sun. "I might have known you'd never make a wife/ You gave up the only one who ever loved you/ and went back to the wild side of life." We sang it just the way we'd heard Hank Thompson sing it on the radio at home.

As the sun beat down on the steel furnace in which we were riding, we sang Kitty Wells' reply. "It wasn't God who made honky-tonk angels/ like you wrote in the words of your song."

With no air-conditioning and all the windows rolled down in the car, we sang, "Jambalaya, crawfish pie, and filé gumbo/ 'cause tonight I'm gonna see ma chere amie-oh" as we drove along Louisiana rice fields.

As we passed roadside taverns, drive-in movies, chrome diners, and tourist cabins, we sang, "When you feel like you're in love/ don't just stand there/ When you see that moon above/ don't just stand there."

We sang "Back Street Affair" as we drove down the main streets and around the public squares of countless little Southern towns. "You didn't know I wasn't free/ when

you fell in love with me/ and with all of your young heart/ you learned to care."

There was nothing in the book we didn't sing and no subject we didn't sing about: honky-tonks, lying, cheating, dancing, drinking, slipping around, and stepping out. We sang lonesome, pitiful songs and up-tempo, happy songs.

Mama joined in and sang with us, and when we begged, she sang, "I Want to be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" and yodeled like Patsy Montana.

Daddy didn't sing. He just drove. When we sang Hank Williams' "Cold Cold Heart" or "Your Cheatin' Heart," he howled like a dog, but we just sang that much louder. "You'll never know how much it hurts to see you sit and cry."

"Daddy, when can we stop? I need to stretch."

"Just over the next hill," Daddy always said. But there were no hills, only mirages on the flat Louisiana horizon.

"Mama, he's setting on the arm rest. He's gonna fall out, ain't he?"

"Make her let me hold the songbook, mama. It's my time now."

"Daddy, if the radiator boiled over and we didn't have any water, would you put Kool-Aid in it?"

"Why can't I use the fan for awhile? He's setting by the window and getting all the air."

"I'm hot!"

"I'm thirsty!"

"I need to go the bathroom. Daddy, pull over if you see some tall weeds."

Daddy suddenly slammed on the brakes. The entire car fell silent. He put the car in neutral and pulled on the emergency brake. With the motor running and the car in the middle of the road, he opened the door, slid

out of his seat, left the door standing wide open, and began walking up the white line that divided the two-lane highway. We had not passed another car for miles.

He walked about fifty feet, turned around, and faced the car. As naturally as if he were climbing into a hammock with a glass of iced tea, he laid down on the white line, spread his arms straight out, and began kicking his legs and flailing his arms and wailing, "Aye-aye-aye-aye-aye-aye."

The car was as quiet as a fresh grave. We looked at Daddy. We looked at Mama. We looked at each other. Abruptly the back doors flew open and all five of us kids jumped out, ran up the white line, and laid down on it between Daddy and the car like peas in a pod. We too began to kick our legs and flail our arms and emulate the uncanny sound that our daddy was making.

Mama walked to Texas that night. We stopped at a motor court and rented a room with a kitchenette. After a supper of noodle soup, Treet crackers, and MoonPies, we made pallets on the floor then bickered over who would sleep in the two double beds.

Just as the sun was setting, we walked to a nearby grocery store to get bananas and milk for breakfast. There we learned that the Texas border was almost within sight. Mama determined that she would set her feet on Texas soil before she went to bed. Within a few minutes she was crossing the invisible border with us behind her like five little ducks in a row. With a Brownie box camera, Daddy made her picture standing by a sign that said "Welcome to Texas."

We sang, "T for Texas/ T for Tennessee." ♦



COWBOY COPAS:

FROM THE HILLS OF ADAMS COUNTY, OHIO, TO THE GRAND OLE OPRY

DANNY FULKS



Front row: Cowboy Copas, Hank Williams, unknown, Rod Brassfield. Back row: unknown, Little Jimmy Dickens. Circa 1949. Photo courtesy author.

The hopeful sounds of guitars, mandolins, banjos, fiddles, and harmony singing rang through the hollows, churches, beer joints, and Grange halls of Adams County, Ohio, in the 1920s and '30s.

Among those living there, in a place called Cameron Hollow, were Marion Elden Copas and his wife, the former Ella Mae Ramsey. Marion Copas made a living farming on the halves and as a day laborer; Ella Mae kept house. The Copas family was poor, but they had the skills to survive.

In 1913, Lloyd Estel, destined to be a country music star, was born. His mother played guitar, his father harmonica and fiddle. Lloyd took to guitar and other string instruments early on, and his teachers at High Hill School enjoyed his music so much they gave up arithmetic class and let him play and sing during school hours.

As a teenager, he was seldom separated from a pack of Bugler roll-your-own tobacco and his guitar. Lloyd hung out at Grooms's grocery store, where lard, sugar, and penny candy were sold. He jammed with friends and sang duets with his brother, Marion. With close vocal harmony

and clean instrumentation, they often covered tunes by the Delmore and Louvin brothers. Another good place to pick was the Grange Hall on Blue Creek where music was combined with potluck suppers and square dances.

By age fifteen, Lloyd was through with school. He hooked up with a local tobacco farmer, Fred Evans, to front a band called The Cacklers. Among their repertoire were songs like "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," made popular by the Sons of the Pioneers, a California band that featured the voice of Roy Rogers, a native of nearby Duck Run in Scioto County, Ohio.

Portsmouth, thirty miles southeast of Blue Creek in Scioto County, was home to 40,000 people. It was a raucous Ohio River town where hustlers came and went, where farmers brought hogs and tobacco to market, and where showboat actors put on melodramas like *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights in a Barroom*.

As roads and cars came, Portsmouth became the center of activity for Adams County and hamlets up and down the river. Bus service from Blue Creek

enabled The Cacklers to join the music scene at barbershops, mom and pop cafés, the Bloody Bucket bar, hotel lounges, and street corners where they busked for coins and greenbacks. Musicians in Portsmouth often moved from one group to another. In this mix, it was easy for Lloyd to learn new licks, riffs, songs, and timing, and to showcase his natural *bonhomie*. He soon met local fiddler Lester Storer, and the duo took off for Cincinnati. There, they played small gigs and busked until they hooked up with Larry Sunblock, a California promoter who gave Lloyd the tag "Cowboy Copas" and passed him off as a real cowboy from Oklahoma. The slim, six-foot-one-inch Copas, with his "Aw, shucks" personality, played the role.

Sunblock billed the dark-skinned Storer, from Peebles, Ohio, "Natchee the Indian," put him in a suede jacket with fringed sleeves, and said he was a native of Arizona. Copas and "Natchee" worked the Cincinnati circuit for ten years, appearing on WLW radio and playing gigs downtown. They landed a guest appearance on the National Barn Dance in Chicago, where Gene Autry was a star. On a trip back home to Adams County, Copas began dating Edna Louise Markins, the sixteen-year-old daughter of former school teacher, farmer, and county auditor Clyde Markins and his wife Evelyn. Edna's parents were skeptical of Copas' vagabond life, but his experience on the road and Edna's intelligence made for a good combination, and they were married onstage in Cincinnati before a show in 1934.

Copas' next career move came in 1941. Jack Taylor, manager of WSAZ-TV in Huntington, West Virginia, offered him a slot in his band, The Rail Splitters, where he

met western-style singer T Texas Tyler and lucked into an old Spanish-American War song, "Filipino Baby." Three years later, King Records in Cincinnati offered Copas a contract to record "Filipino Baby," Grandpa Jones' "Tragic Romance," and two other songs.

After long, lean years, Cowboy Copas had a hit on his hands. "Filipino Baby" became a quintessential war song that touched American soldiers away from home. Upbeat, swinging, and purely American, the song resonated throughout the world. Its strong bass beat slammed from juke boxes in beer joints and USO clubs. Rural and urban listeners took to it, and the song sold a million copies.

Pee Wee King, a member of the Grand Ole Opry and leader of a group called The Golden West Cowboys, gave Copas a job. When King left Nashville and returned to his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, Copas formed his own band, The Oklahoma Cowboys. Now in the national spotlight, he continued to move his voice away from hints of hillbilly twang. His music featured lead guitar notes, bluesy riffs, and clean runs on guitar.

In 1948, Redd Stewart, a member of King's band, wrote what would become an American classic: "The Tennessee Waltz." Cowboy Copas was the first to put it on a record, and it ran up the Billboard charts. In 1950, when Patti Page recorded it with a full orchestra, it became the number-one song in the nation for thirty weeks. Later recordings by Les Paul and Mary Ford, Alma Cogan, Sam Cooke, Eva Cassidy, and Norah Jones gave testimony to the song's power.

Copas waltzed toward the 1950s at the top of the Grand Ole Opry, played Carnegie Hall, and rode across the country in a Chrysler Imperial limousine to sold-out night shows and afternoon matinees.

Oftentimes he opened for western double features starring Johnny Mack Brown, Lash Larue, Roy Rogers, and Gene Autry. Back in Nashville on Saturday nights, he smoked Lucky Strikes and drank longnecks at Tootsie's Orchard Lounge with Hank Williams and Ernest Tubb.

Soon, though, songs like Copas' "'Tis Sweet to Be Remembered" were eclipsed by snare drums, wicked piano licks, and raucous notes played on solid-body Fender guitars. Songs with lyrics that reeked of sexuality moved up the charts. Sad songs about car wrecks, murders, and broken love affairs seemed tame.

RCA hired a subtle, classy guitar player, Chet Atkins, to change Nashville music. Singers like Don Gibson, Eddy Arnold, Jim Reeves, and Marty Robbins gave up cowboy hats and boots for sport coats, black-and-white wingtips, suits, and ties. Their soft love songs were backed up by orchestras.

The old Nashville guard tried packaged shows with Jimmie Dickens, Martha Carson, Hank Snow, and Roy Acuff. They hired Elvis Presley to open these shows, but the deal was short-lived.

Copas gave up his band, played shows on his own with his daughter Kathy and local musicians, did backup guitar sessions, and played small venues with Grandpa Jones and David "Stringbean" Akeman. Luck still followed him, however. One day in the studio, Copas was fooling around with guitar runs and humming an old tune from blues performer Frank Hutchinson. Producers in the room liked what they heard. Copas suggested they name the tune "Alabam." An executive with Starday Records agreed to record Copas' version. Fans were ready for a novelty song that went back to roots music, was upbeat, fun, and featured bouncing

lead guitar runs from Copas himself.

"Alabam" moved up to number one on the Billboard country charts and was covered by Pat Boone in the pop genre. Again, Cowboy Copas was in demand for live shows. Money came in, and the 1960s brought a modest revival in traditional Nashville music. Stars who could afford it began to fly to gigs, which offered more chances to play out of town and be back home for the Saturday night Opry. Copas' son-in-law, Randy Hughes, who was Patsy Cline's manager, bought a used green and yellow single-engine Piper Comanche.

Hughes's flight training was limited to short flights around Nashville. He navigated by visual cues: rivers, railroads, and lakes. When Copas was voted into the Nebraska Cowboy Hall of Fame in 1962, Hughes flew him, his wife Lucille, and daughter Kathy on his first long flight. It turned out to be a fun trip, with clear skies all the way.

On March 3, 1963, a gig came up in Kansas City, Kansas. It was to be a benefit show for the family of country disc jockey Cactus Jack Call, who had died in a car wreck. Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, Dottie West, George Jones, Charlie Walker, and Copas were among those invited to perform. Randy Hughes fired up the Comanche, loaded up Patsy Cline, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Copas, and their instruments, and headed west.

After the sold-out show, local weather was not suitable for flying



Cowboy and Kathy Copas at the Grand Ole Opry, 1953. Photo courtesy author.

in a small plane. Hughes and his passengers agreed to stay in town until the weather cleared. On Tuesday, March 5, even though the weather was still ominous, Hughes and the passengers agreed to head back toward Nashville, stop at a few small airports, and get home before dark. Hughes filed no flight plan. Enduring a rough ride east through clouds and rain, he looked for rivers, towns, and roads before putting the plane down in Dyersburg, Tennessee. With a handful of negative weather reports, the airport manager urged the group to spend the night there. But Hughes insisted they take off on the last leg of the trip, ninety-three miles toward a small airport in Camden,

Tennessee. No radio contact was heard from the aircraft through the night. The next day, in a drizzling cold rain, rescue personnel found the Comanche's mangled wreckage, surrounding crushed guitars, bloody suits, and four dead bodies, in a wooded area called Foggy Bottom, five miles west of the Tennessee River near the Camden airport.

The loss of three major country music stars in one air crash shook the Nashville community and fans around the world. Cowboy Copas, on top again in a comeback with his hit "Alabam," was fifty. Patsy Cline, whose fame soared after her death at thirty, would later be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Hawkshaw Hawkins, at forty-two, did not live to see his biggest hit, "Lonesome 77203," become a top-ten country song. Pilot Randy Hughes was thirty-five.

Cowboy Copas was buried near other country music stars on "Music Row" in Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens in Goodlettsville, Tennessee. Among the thousands of mourners who showed up for his funeral on March 8 was the Governor of Tennessee, Frank G. Clement.

Copas' last single, "Goodbye Kisses," made the top fifteen on the *Billboard* chart one month after his death. ♦

FLY SWIFT AROUND YE WHEELS OF TIME

DANA WILDSMITH



Shape note singers at Folk Week 2013. Photo courtesy Ron Pen.

Since 1984, a group of Hindman Family Folk Week participants has met in the basement dorm of the May Stone building in southeast Kentucky every afternoon of that week to sing from *The Sacred Harp* hymnal. These singers are a mixed demographic bag, which recently has included more and more teens and young adults, in love with the music and poetry of *The Sacred Harp*.

"If you don't mind, let's begin with 'China.' That's page 163, at the bottom."

"One-sixty-three. At the bottom."

Eliza Scruton's immediate repeat of Ron Pen's page announcement swings musically on the weight of her accented words. It's a cheery effect, and we all grin as we look down while we flip pages in the copies of *The Sacred Harp* resting open on our laps. Each book's burgundy cover spreads from bare knee to bare knee on this hot June afternoon at Hindman Settlement School.

No one touched their books when Ron Pen first announced the page, because by Folk Week tradition, we could not turn to page 163 until Eliza sang out her response to Ron's call. It's a tradition Eliza mostly took over from her dad, John, a year or two ago, but sometimes father and daughter both give us a sing-song repetition of page number, and that's alright, too. We just can't open to the song until at least one Scruton leads us there.

Ron steps more to the middle of our hollow square now that we are ready. He is not wearing shorts like most

of us, but rather overalls, the same ones he has worn since Appalachian Family Folk Week began three days before.

Ron shifts his book to his left hand, plants his flip-flopped feet firmly for balance, and swoops his right arm frontward, then backward, again and again in a big man's mighty wave of Common Meter. We swim along as we sing the shapes: "La, sol, sol, fa, fa, la, la, la, la, sol, sol...."

Ron stops us after we have sung through the shapes on the melody line, or "air," as it is called in Sacred Harp singing. He shifts his focus to the group seated in a row of chairs running at an exact right angle to the air singers. In any other choral setting, these singers would be known as altos, but in the world of shape notes, they are "counters."

"Counters, you're in luck. You get to sing a few notes other than E and F in this one." Betty Lou Whitford, a distinguished Auburn University dean fifty-one weeks of the year, snarls her lip in Folk Week time-honored commentary on the sorry treatment meted to the counter line in shape note tunes. Counters get no respect.

Ron acknowledges Betty Lou's expected response with a professorial smile and nods to a diminutive counter two chairs down from her.

"Susie, what's your pitch?"

Susie Ritchie hits the pitch dead-on, and the counters sing their shapes. Next, Ron leads the basses through their shapes, and then the trebles, before we join to sing the shapes as a group, creating a great cacophonous blather of syllables.

Finally, we sing the poetry: "Why do we mourn departing friends, or shake at death's alarms? 'Tis but the voice that Jesus sends to call them to His arms."

As the basses rumble along at the bottom of their range, Mary Longhill is rhythmically pumping the foot pedal of her spinning wheel a few feet behind them. Mary whirls another hank of wool into yarn as we head into verse two, and she'll keep spinning until we finish our afternoon singing. We can't sing without her.

Mary isn't the lone listener to our afternoon sing. Across the room, Sonny Houston creaks the floorboards with his rocking chair. A songwriter whose phrases are hauntingly evocative, he rocks with his eyes closed, his long grey hair resting soft against the chair's inscribed dedication to Jean Ritchie. Jean used to rock in that chair, with her head against the slat just below where Sonny's head is now.

And then there's Pumpkin. Alison guides Pumpkin's motorized chair into the Great Hall at some point during each afternoon's session. And Ron always asks Alison if Pumpkin could come into the middle of the square. As soon as the brake is set on Pumpkin's chair, Ron stands the singers and we begin to sing, not only to each other and to God but to Pumpkin, who cannot sing or even speak.

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen, is fallen. Babylon is fallen to rise no more."

Pumpkin cannot speak, but can he smile.

Only at Hindman's Family Folk Week Shape Note singing have I encountered traditions so firmly centered in individuals, so uniquely

personal to the gathering. Rich Kirby has been involved in shape note singing at Hindman since the beginning. He had encountered Sacred Harp at various folk festivals throughout the northeast and was drawn to the music. Sometime around 1984, he brought copies of *The Sacred Harp* to Family Folk Week and got a group together in the basement dorm. It was, he says, "sort of like the blind leading the blind."

Ron Pen was part of that first singing: "I remember we were downstairs below the Great Hall in the 'Lady's Dorm.' There may have been five or six of us. We landed on 'Northfield' and sang through it with some amusement. When we got to a hymn with the words 'pains and groans and grief and fears,' we started parodying it as 'lions and tigers and bears, oh my.'"

And then Ron said something to me that hit right at the heart of why Family Folk Week's always free-wheeling, sometimes seemingly irreverent singing is so deeply vital to those of us who participate: "We all shared a great moment of humor, and a bond and link of friendship was formed."

At Family Folk Week, our group of singers was of one thoughtful voice when I asked each of them to tell me why this singing matters.

From the under twenty-five set:

Ben Scruton: "I think it's really cool to be able to sing these songs with their beautiful harmonies. There's so much tradition. I find it powerful."

Lydia Grossman: "I like it because you don't have to worry about technique. You can just enjoy the raw harmonies."

John Taylor Hosmer-Quint: "I like

everything about it—its powerful, beautiful, and unique sound."

And from the somewhat over twenty-five set:

Patty Kannapel: "I like the camaraderie and community feel of it."

John Scruton: "I really like the music and the poetry; the poetry is enlightening. And of course we have a lot of fun in class."

Larry Germain: "It is a truly organic way of sharing music. The notes come through us as individual singers and as a choir. We are both inside and outside the music, becoming one with it even as we share it, receiving it while delivering it."

Hugh McGraw, general chairman of the Music Committee responsible for the 1991 edition of *The Sacred Harp*, once declared, "I wouldn't cross the street to hear this music, but I'd walk a hundred miles on broken glass to sing it."

Says Ron Pen, "This is the story of a small group of people drawn to a musical expression one summer in a basement dorm, who grew into an organized annual community of folks bound by the musical and social harmony engendered by *The Sacred Harp*. And when we close with 'Parting Friends' on Friday evening, the hollow square includes the audience as the fourth side. We are all one in this delicious utopian community of family renewal."

"What's the page, Eliza?"

"Two-sixty-seven."

"I go away behind to leave you/ perhaps never to meet again/ but if we never have the pleasure/ I hope we'll meet on Canaan's land." ♦♦

Dana Wildsmith is author of the memoir *Back to Abnormal: Surviving with an Old Farm in the New South*.



HYMN

LLEWELLYN MCKERNAN

Music comes
from the trumpet vine
that wakes up dawn;
The dancing lady's
slipper at noon,
and the little mushrooms,
each cool shady head
a whole note rest.

Then comes one bird
that sings all alone,
as if it had no nest
nor mate to bless.

That's when
Jack in the Pulpit
starts his sermon. His
rapture, rhythmic
as verse, conjures
up the congregation
of grass, the white lilies
in the church yard.

Frog-burp, toad-jump, fox
crouch and crunch
add their cacophony
while the moon moves slow

as a golden dirge
across the sky, a mass
of dark clouds
its requiem.

Llewellyn McKernan, of Barboursville, West Virginia, has a master's degree in creative writing from Brown University.



"HELL'S BROKE LOOSE IN GEORGIA!"

TED OLSON



On July 22, 1998, the United States Postal Service issued this stamp in memory of Stephen Vincent Benét on the 100th anniversary of his birth. © United States Postal Service. All rights reserved.

One of the few narrative poems set in Appalachia that has gained significant national recognition, Stephen Vincent Benét's 139-line poem "The Mountain Whippoorwill" vividly interprets the Appalachian tradition of fiddle contests. Composed in 1925 by the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author, "The Mountain Whippoorwill" is noteworthy for its celebration of Appalachian culture and the dialect associated with the region, and for its vigorous and mysterious musicality. For decades incorporated into various literary anthologies, the poem is most memorable when recited with the sort of flair and energy associated with mountain fiddling.

Fiddle contests have occurred in various Appalachian locations from the late nineteenth century through the present day, but they were particularly popular during the early twentieth century. Benét's poem, while fictionalized, is based on a specific contest, the 1924 Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers' Convention. The convention was held annually at the old Atlanta City Auditorium from 1913 to 1935. The 1924 convention was the setting for some high drama: First prize for fiddling

that year went to a then-unknown fiddler named Lowe Stokes, from Cartersville, Georgia, who beat the long-established star of Georgia fiddle competitions, Fiddlin' John Carson. Today a legend of early country music, Carson was renowned even then for having been the first old-time musician to perform on radio. In 1922 he began hosting a regular radio show on Atlanta's WSB, a station whose signal reached thirty-eight states. Carson also played and sang on the first commercial "hillbilly music" records. His two numbers from a June 1923 location recording session in Atlanta, "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" and "The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's Going to Crow," were released on a 78 rpm record by the Okeh label. Pioneering record producer Ralph Peer only begrudgingly recorded the champion fiddler that day, thinking there was no audience for recordings of Southern white vernacular music. Carson's swiftly-selling record proved skeptics wrong.

Newspaper articles reporting the outcome of the 1924 contest in Atlanta stressed Stokes' youthfulness, despite the fact that he was in his mid-twenties at the

time of his victory over Carson. An article appearing in the December 6, 1924, issue of *The Literary Digest* observed that Stokes “came down from the Blue Ridge foothills primed with all the Southern tunes that he had learned from his grandad [sic], and full of the spirit of victory.” Such prose caught Benét’s attention. Then living in New York City, he had grown fond of old-time music as a youth while spending several summers in the town of Highlands, in Macon County, North Carolina. Moved by what he read in that article and by what he remembered of his own encounters with Appalachian culture, Benét soon composed “The Mountain Whippoorwill,” publishing it in the March 1925 issue of *Century Magazine*.

After emerging as a champion fiddler, Stokes joined the north Georgia-based string band The Skillet Lickers, one of the most popular 1920s-era “hillbilly” music acts. Featuring two other talented fiddlers, Clayton McMichen and Gid Tanner, as well as the acclaimed blind guitarist Riley Puckett, The Skillet Lickers recorded more than 100 sides for Columbia from 1926 through the mid-1930s. His participation in The Skillet Lickers overshadowed by the presence of these other musicians within the same band, Stokes today is remembered more for having been the basis for Benét’s fictional “Hillbilly Jim” than for his own fiddle recordings.

A legend associated with Fiddlin’ John Carson forms the background to “The Mountain Whippoorwill.” As recounted by scholar Gene Wiggins in his 1989 book *Fiddlin’ Georgia Crazy: Fiddlin’ John*



Charlie Daniels in action. Photo courtesy Charlie Daniels Band website.

Carson, His Real World, and the World of His Songs, Carson emerged from obscurity at the end of the nineteenth century by winning a fiddle contest against a famous competitor, Tennessee’s Governor Bob Taylor, nicknamed “Fiddlin’ Bob.” At this particular contest, supposedly held in Memphis, judges declared “Fiddlin’ Bob” the winner, but the governor declared that Carson had played better that day and deserved to win. The judges subsequently awarded first prize to Carson, who was thereafter tagged with the sobriquet “Fiddlin’ John,” and the governor publicly—and quite spontaneously—presented his fiddle to the younger man.

“The Mountain Whippoorwill” is among the more beloved American poems. For many years after its

initial publication, it was often featured in high school literary anthologies. Today it is more likely to be encountered on YouTube, in homemade videos posted there by amateur musicians and storytellers who interpret the poem according to their own sensibilities. Enlivened both by Benét’s vivid literary rendering of Appalachia’s dialect (the poem features a highly stylized approximation of Appalachian English and evocative use of idiomatic phrases) and by Benét’s incorporation of the rhythms of southern mountain music (the poem is comprised of emphatically metered and rhymed couplets), “The Mountain Whippoorwill” is uniquely suited for oral recitation. Such renderings, whether augmented by instrumental accompaniment or not, tend to be highly charged, even exhilarating. The poem’s subtitle, “How Hill-Billy Jim Won the Great Fiddler’s Prize (A Georgia Romance),” underscores the romantic lure of the narrative’s plot.

The most famous recitation of the poem is by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band’s John McEuen, a skilled multi-instrumentalist whose enthralling solo rendition of the poem, accompanied by his own deftly-frailed banjo, was a highlight of the band’s live album from 1974, *Stars and Stripes Forever*. McEuen identified with “The Mountain Whippoorwill” so deeply that he rerecorded the poem two more times: in 1985 for his eponymous solo debut album and in 2000 for a concert album recorded with another band member, Jimmy Ibbotson. Other professional acts have likewise performed the poem. For instance, the Irish Rovers, a band of expatriate Irish musicians based in Canada,

reinterpreted Benét's poem during concerts, though, not surprisingly, the band recast the setting of the narrative from north Georgia to Antrim, Northern Ireland.

One longtime fan of "The Mountain Whippoorwill" is country music star Charlie Daniels. During recording sessions in 1979, Daniels and his band were faced with the challenge of rounding out an album under considerable time pressure. As Daniels related to Dorothy Horstman for an anthology of country song lyrics: "During the spring of 1979, we were recording our *Million Mile Reflections* album, and after completing the majority of the tracks, realized that we need a fiddle tune for this album. I have always admired a poem called '[The] Mountain Whippoorwill' by Stephen Vincent Benét that I read while I was in high school, and I got the idea for '[The] Devil Went Down to Georgia' from that poem, which

was written about 1925."

The song also incorporated narrative elements—specifically, echoing the west African myth of Legba, the musical trickster god of liminal spaces—from Mississippi bluesman Robert Johnson's 1936 recording "Cross Roads Blues." Yet Benét's poem was the central influence on Daniels' classic song, and phrases overtly taken from "The Mountain Whippoorwill" sparkle in "The Devil Went Down to Georgia"—chiefly, "Hell's broke loose in Georgia" and "fire on the mountain" (both of which Benét had originally borrowed from the titles of Appalachian fiddle tunes).

"The Devil Went Down to Georgia" may prove to be the recording by which Daniels is best remembered. The biggest hit of his more than 50-year recording career, it rose to number one on the *Billboard* Country Singles chart and to number three on the same publication's

Hot 100 chart. It later won a Grammy Award for Best Country Vocal Performance. "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" continues to appeal to listeners across the spectrum of musical tastes and to people around the world.

While "The Mountain Whippoorwill" has cast a very long shadow, it cannot claim the global reach of the hit country song that the poem inspired, which simply means that there are many more lives to be immeasurably enriched by Benét's poem. To fall under the spell of "The Mountain Whippoorwill," uninitiated readers need only encounter the poem's poignant story with an open mind and a willing heart, and before long they will begin to hear the poem's enchanting, distinctively Appalachian music: "Up in the mountains, it's lonesome all the time . . ." ♦

Ted Olson is professor of Appalachian Studies at ETSU. He served as music section editor and associate editor for the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.

SWEET GEORGIA BROWN: THE TANGLED ROOTS OF A POPULAR TUNE

EDWINA PENDARVIS



"Sweet Georgia Brown" is best known internationally as the theme song of the Harlem Globetrotters. The composite above combines an image of the 1949 instrumental version of the song by Brother Bones and His Shadows (adopted by the Globetrotters in 1952) with Georgia Brown from Betsy Layne, Kentucky (1895-1969). Image of Georgia Brown courtesy Nathan Gray via Gary Clarke.

The Harlem Globetrotters' famous theme song is said to be about an African-American prostitute, but there are at least two other popular opinions on the subject. I heard the eastern Kentucky opinion from my uncle, who told me about a friend of his, an older woman he'd known in the 1960s:

An absolutely gorgeous woman. You know the song, "Sweet Georgia Brown?" That's about her. And you know where Betsy Layne is in Floyd County. Well, she was born in Betsy Layne, and her grandmother was Betsy Layne. Anyway, Georgia Brown was the sweetheart of one of the Vanderbilts. I don't remember which one, but a mistress of one of them. When she was in her fifties or sixties, she

moved back to Kentucky—inherited a coal dock and a tippie up there at her dad's coal mine and bought a little house on Cumberland Court in Pikeville.

My uncle's story intrigues me. I'm not sure I believe it. It's possible that Georgia Brown from Betsy Layne just told people the song was about her, capitalizing on the popularity of a song that may as well have been written about her, as far as she was concerned. It's also possible that a pianist who knew the song played it for her at a party and pretended he was making it up in a spontaneous tribute to her. A local history web site reports that Pikeville's C&O Railroad passenger terminal was "the point of arrival and departure of common folks and dignitaries alike . . . including first lady Eleanor

Roosevelt and Sweet Georgia Brown, the celebrated socialite who spent her final years in Pikeville."

In researching the history of the song, I found that the tune does have Appalachian roots. The composer, Maceo Pinkard, was born

stunning he made up a song about her right there on the spot.

If these stories are true, she moved to New York about 1913. Maceo probably moved there, from Omaha, sometime in 1919. Already making a name for himself as a com-

to slaves in portrayals of the Old South. Though these qualities once played into stereotypes, Freeman Davis's music evokes a joyous, trickster spirit that surely helped many African Americans overcome the circumstances imposed

IN NEW YORK, AT A NIGHTCLUB OR PARTY, AS THE STORY GOES, A PIANO PLAYER THOUGHT HER SO STUNNING HE MADE UP A SONG ABOUT HER RIGHT THERE ON THE SPOT.

in Bluefield, West Virginia, in 1897. He grew up there and graduated from the Bluefield Colored Institute (now Bluefield State College). At age seventeen, he began touring with his own band. He settled in Omaha, Nebraska, first, and then moved to New York City. My uncle's friend, Georgia Brown, was a couple of years older than Pinkard. The daughter of John and Belle Layne Brown, she was born in 1895; and she, too, was one of the growing number of young people moving from the country to the city during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The first "great migration" of African Americans from the rural South to cities in the Midwest and Northeast was in full swing when Maceo Pinkard left home.

I'm not sure of the exact date that either Maceo or Georgia arrived in New York City. Local stories have it that, when she was eighteen, Georgia went to Jenkins, Kentucky, one summer and was waitressing at a coal company commissary there when somebody wealthy, maybe a Vanderbilt, maybe a Rockefeller, came through. The railroad (or oil) baron, a married man, fell in love with her, and she went off to New York City with him. In New York, at a nightclub or party, as the story goes, a piano player thought her so

poser, he had contacts in New York. He may also have been worried about the racial climate in Omaha. Tensions were rising there and finally erupted in a race riot in September 1919. A mob lynched an African-American man jailed as a suspect in a rape case and almost lynched the mayor for trying to protect him.

In New York, Pinkard became a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance and Tin Pan Alley, the center of the sheet music industry. His compositions helped start the Charleston dance craze with the Broadway show *Liza* in 1922. And in 1925, he wrote the most famous Charleston tune of all time, "Sweet Georgia Brown."

Though the song has been performed by many famous artists—Ethel Waters, Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby, Stéphane Grappelli, the Beatles, Ray Charles, Doc and Merle Watson, Anita O'Day, and Jerry Lee Lewis, to name a few—a 1949 recording by Brother Bones (Freeman Davis) and His Shadows is by far the most famous interpretation. Adopted in 1952 by the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team as a theme song, Brother Bones' rendition has traveled with the team around the world. This whistling, bones-playing version emphasizes the amiable, mischievous nature attributed

on them in slavery and during the Jim Crow era.

It's possible, if unlikely, that Georgia Brown met Pinkard at a party or nightclub and inspired him to write the music. Or maybe she met Ken Casey, the man who wrote the lyrics. I couldn't find out much about him—only that he was white, had been a child actor, and attended New York University. Here's part of the chorus he wrote:

It's been said she knocks 'em
dead when she lands in town/
Since she came why it's a
shame how she's cooled 'em
down/ Fellas that she can't get
must be fellas that she ain't
met/ Georgia claimed her,
Georgia named her, Sweet
Georgia Brown.

The last line says the new gal is from Georgia, but here's why that doesn't negate the eastern Kentucky Georgia's claim. Credit for co-writing "Sweet Georgia Brown" is given to bandleader Ben Bernie, who didn't write the music or the lyrics. Bernie got this credit in exchange for recording the song. Nonetheless, he's supposed to have said the lyrics came out of his hearing an anecdote from Senator George Thaddeus Brown,

who told him about the Georgia General Assembly's resolution calling for Senator Brown's daughter, born on August 11, 1911, to be named "Georgia." I think Bernie may have suggested this line or added it, but it's hard to credit this anecdote as the song's inspiration. The senator's daughter, only about fourteen years old in 1925, wouldn't fit the rest of the lyrics.

As to whether the song is about an African-American woman, it's hard even to sort that out. The lyrics include a line to be sung as either "And ever since she came, the common folks all claim" or as "And ever since she came, the colored folks all claim." The words "colored folks" were used by Ethel Waters in a 1925 performance. Waters might have changed the word "common" to "colored." Then again, maybe "colored" was changed to "common" when that usage of "colored" became less acceptable. Regardless, Lena Horne's portrayal of a "floozy" named Georgia Brown, in the 1940 movie *Cabin in the Sky*, strengthened the

song's association with an African-American temptress.

Floyd County Georgia Brown has a shady reputation that could have inspired the song or been inspired by it. In answer to an Internet question from a woman who said she owns a rocking chair that belonged to Georgia Brown came this reply: "Sweet Georgia Brown, as local legend has it, was rather infamously known as having run a brothel. Supposedly she was beautiful, polished and well-liked in spite of her profession. . . . I think her brothel was outside of Kentucky, possibly in New Orleans." Reporter June Johnson writes in an *Appalachian Express* article that Georgia Brown from eastern Kentucky was a talented musician and entrepreneur but that some of Georgia's relatives were ashamed of her affiliation with John D. Rockefeller.

About that affiliation. It seems nearly impossible that Georgia was the mistress of John D. Rockefeller—senior or junior. Maybe my uncle is right and she was a Vanderbilt's mistress. Or maybe she was neither.

I found no plausible link to any Rockefeller and only one remote possibility among the Vanderbilts.

Georgia died in Pikeville in 1969 at age seventy-four. In the *Appalachian Express* article about her, Johnson writes, "Her name will never be forgotten as long as there are ballgames and class bands to play her song."

Maceo Pinkard died in 1962 in New York City, at the age of sixty-five. One of the finest composers of the early jazz era, he published over 200 songs, including the jazz standard "Them There Eyes." His best-loved tune, though, will always be "Sweet Georgia Brown." Its complex melody sounds easy and off-handed, recalling a rural past and an exuberance about the future.

The song's true subject might never be known. It might just stay hidden in a tangle of possibilities, elusive, like those Globetrotters' basketballs bouncing to its music, something fun to wonder about and chase after. ♦

Edwina Pendarvis writes about Appalachian life and literature. Material collected for *Raft Tide and Railroad*, her collection of family stories, inspired her interest in "Sweet Georgia Brown."



AN APPALACHIAN SCORE:

A FAMILY'S MUSICAL HERITAGE FROM FIDDLELING TO CLASSICAL VIOLIN

MELISSA NIPPER



A young Ken Stidham holding a fiddle. Photo courtesy Kellie Dubel Brown.

Front-porch folk music and bluegrass rhythms seem worlds away when Dr. Kellie Dubel Brown raises her baton to conduct the Milligan College Orchestra or when she plays her violin with the Johnson City Symphony Orchestra in East Tennessee.

Brown is known regionally for her expertise in classical violin and conducting. She has been a member of the Milligan music faculty since 1998 and serves as chair of the music department, director of the strings program, and conductor of the Milligan Orchestra. She is a frequent clinician and performer throughout the country and serves as the assistant conductor of the Johnson City Symphony Orchestra and assistant concertmaster for the Symphony of the Mountains. Her repertoire includes more Mozart than Monroe.

But if Brown's life had a score, it would be a lush orchestral soundtrack sprinkled with fiddle tunes, flavored with the distinctive sound of the banjo, but dominated by the beauty of the violin. It would bring

listeners on a journey that begins on the front porch of her family's old home place in Piney Flats, Tennessee, where her grandfather, Kenneth Stidham, and his brothers spent hours making music.

Musical Gifts

"I grew up in a family where everyone played multiple instruments," Brown said. "They were self-taught musicians. Most of them didn't read music, and if they did, they read shape notes. But my grandfather could play anything from sacred music to Appalachian folk tunes."

The Stidham brothers weren't professionally trained musicians; they were blue-collar workers who made music on the side. But their gift for music was undeniable and known throughout the region.

Stidham and his family played bluegrass music on radio station WOPI in Bristol and recorded several albums. Later, Stidham devoted himself entirely to gos-

pel music, playing at churches and venues throughout the country.

"Music was a part of what my family did, going back generations to my great-great grandfather, a circuit-riding Methodist minister who led gospel singings," Brown said.

Brown's uncle, Jim Stidham, remembers one gig in the 1930s where his family was invited to play music at a square dance held at a local business. This wasn't just any Friday night dance. The host had just installed hardwood floors that needed to be sanded. So he poured two inches of sand over the rough wood and invited the community to dance the night away. After four nights of music and movement, the smooth floors gleamed.

Banjo Beginnings

Though many of her violin students would never guess, Brown's first stringed instrument after a few years of piano and organ lessons was the banjo.

"I liked the metallic sound of it and the particular picking-type patterns," she said. "I learned to play 'Cripple Creek' pretty well but ultimately decided to do something different."

Bluegrass and gospel weren't the only musical styles she grew up hearing. She enjoyed visits to the Kingsport Symphony, and her family attended a church with an orchestra. The beautiful sounds of the strings strongly beckoned her toward the classical violin.

When she was twelve, Brown took her first violin lesson. Six weeks later, she quit.

"The violin is a slow-return instrument," she said. "It's very complicated and can be quite frustrating because you make a lot of bad sounds in the beginning



Kellie Brown conducting. Photo courtesy Kellie Dubel Brown.

and it takes a long time before you can achieve a beautiful sound. Most people give up before they get there."

But she gave it one more chance.

"Somehow, it clicked. That summer I went to a Suzuki camp that grouped students by how many songs they knew. I was frustrated that I had to sit down after just a short while and children much younger could play so much more. I went home and practiced three to four hours a day to catch up."

That began Brown's dedication to the violin and a style of music much different from the fiddling of her grandfather.

"My grandfather supported me playing the violin," she said. "He was intrigued by people who were classically trained. He did teach me some fiddle tunes on the side, such as 'Faded Love' and 'Bonaparte's Retreat.'"

Her grandfather died in 1984, after spending the day working on an album. He was scheduled to play on the Grand Ole Opry, an opportunity he would never experience. How-

ever, he left behind children and grandchildren who continue his musical legacy in their own styles.

A Music Maker

Brown's uncle Jim found his niche creating the beautiful instruments he grew up hearing. From his workshop in Blountville, Tennessee, he carves guitars, dulcimers, mandolins, and fiddles.

"I made my first instrument, a dulcimer, when I was fifty-five," Jim said. "I used walnut wood from my friend's property. I always wanted to work with wood; it's fun to take an old, rough piece and see what you can make of it."

He has sold some of his instruments, but most of them are like old friends—he likes to keep them around.

Though Jim claims that making instruments is his real musical calling, he also plays guitar in jam sessions every Wednesday at the Greyhound Bus Station in Bristol, Tennessee. On the second Saturday of the month, he performs with his

friends at the Tennessee Welcome Center in Bristol. Friday evenings are reserved for sessions with the Appalachian Heritage Music Association at the historic Anderson House in Blountville.

"Music is in our blood," Jim said.

Classically Trained

Although she chose a different musical route, Brown didn't move far from the family home place, which was claimed in the early 1950s by TVA for the creation of Boone Lake. She studied at Furman University, East Tennessee State University, and Appalachian State University, and holds a bachelor's degree in music education, a master's degree in violin performance, and a doctoral degree in higher education administration, with an emphasis in music administration.

"Music is Kellie's life," said her mother, Nancy Dubel. "She intertwines her church work with her music, and it's so satisfying to see how she can use it to do the Lord's work."

As a soloist Brown has performed several world premieres including *An Encounter for Violin and Piano* by Jane Perry. She has also conducted numerous world premieres including *Three Genres* by John Grubb and *Genesis* by Kenton Coe.

Though Brown doesn't claim to be a fiddler, at some points throughout her musical career, she has veered off her classical path for various artists and engagements. She played "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" with Charlie Daniels when he performed at Fun Fest in Kingsport, Tennessee. She has even donned a cowboy hat to play backup for country star Ray Price.

Her passion for and expertise in musical theater has made her in demand throughout the region as a performer, conductor, and musical director. She has performed in pit orchestras for shows and operas at Virginia's Barter Theatre and other regional venues.

In addition, she has written numerous compositions, arrangements, and articles and is a recog-

nized authority on music in the concentration camps during the Holocaust. She has given her lecture "Alma Rosé and the Women's Orchestra at Auschwitz: Lessons on Tolerance and the Triumph of the Human Spirit" all over the United States. In 2005 her first book, *An Annotated Bibliography of Musical Fiction*, was published.

One of her proudest achievements is teaching her son, Jordan, to play violin. He is a senior on a music scholarship at Furman University, where he plays in the orchestra.

Whether Brown is sharing her gift with her son or with her students at Milligan College, her goal is to do for others what her Appalachian roots did for her—instill an appreciation for music in its many forms.

"For some, music is how they make sense of the world," Brown said. "For me, teaching music is a ministry, and I am grateful for the variety of music I have experienced and how it all has shaped me." ♦

Melissa Nipper is the communications coordinator in the public relations office at Milligan College. She worked for nine years as a sections editor at the *Lexington Herald-Leader* in Kentucky.

J. WILLIAM ADKINS:

TELLING TALES

RANDY SANDERS



Joe Adkins. Photo courtesy artist.

Over the past five years, fourteen graduates from the prestigious St. Albans School in Washington, D.C., have enrolled at the University of Virginia. Joe Adkins was not one of them. Years ago, Adkins attended another St. Albans—in West Virginia.

"I went to St. Albans High School, but I didn't quite make it all the way to the end," Adkins says, "I ended up getting a G.E.D. I always jokingly tell people that I was valedictorian of my G.E.D. class."

Listening to Joe Adkins talk about his childhood in West Virginia, one becomes acutely aware that he is an artist with a keen sense of place.

"I'm from a neighborhood called Marlaine, on the outskirts of St. Albans, where the Route 35 Valley Drive-In used to be, in western Kanawha County. Marlaine is

near the confluence of the Coal and Kanawha rivers.

"I didn't know what a city block was for a very long time, but then again, the Kanawha Valley has a weird industrial/post-apocalyptic aura to it even though the surrounding area is basically forest. The train tracks are a big part of my psyche. I can instantly identify the sound of a Kanawha Valley train.

"I spent a lot of time playing on abandoned coal barges in the Kanawha River, and I spent a lot of time in the woods. I considered Charleston [about twelve miles downriver from St. Albans] to be an enormous city, like something out of [the movie] *Bladerunner*."

Joe Adkins is fearless when it comes to taking the road less traveled. While his high school contemporaries were attending structured classes, young Adkins was receiving

a different sort of education.

"I spent my teenage years traveling around Appalachia and elsewhere with my friend and mentor, Robin Kessinger."

Kessinger is known far and wide as a flat pick guitar legend. It is a testament to Kessinger's recognition of talent (and Adkins's exceptional

In the early 1990s, Adkins met George Crumb. "I was probably twenty years old or so when I finally met him. He came to the University of Charleston to give a talk and attend a Kronos Quartet performance of his *Black Angels*. At that time, which I'm sure he doesn't remember since I was just some random kid, I

ten years working as a graphic designer and web developer." Once again, Adkins showed himself a prodigy of sorts, this time in the visual arts.

"I never studied visual arts, formally. I always used to draw and paint as a kid. I used to make little oil paintings and try to sell

BUT EVEN IN THOSE TEENAGE YEARS, ADKINS BEGAN STUDYING CLASSICAL GUITAR AND STARTED WRITING MUSIC INFLUENCED BY CLASSICAL MUSIC COMPOSERS—A HARBINGER OF THINGS TO COME.

skill) that he would take the young, Carter Family-style guitar-playing Adkins on the road with him. But even in those teenage years, Adkins began studying classical guitar and started writing music influenced by classical music composers—a harbinger of things to come.

"There's lots of music in my family," Adkins says. "My Great-Grandmother Zella was a musician, and my Grandmother Sally is a great church musician and Sweet Adelines singer. I have a distant cousin, Hasil Adkins, who helped define the psychobilly genre."

Eventually, Adkins left the life of a road musician and entered the University of Charleston. Not surprisingly, he became interested in musical composition early on in his college career. It was there that Jim Lange, the university's classical guitar instructor, introduced Adkins to the music of George Crumb.

Crumb, a fellow Kanawha Countian, is an acclaimed composer of contemporary classical music. He received the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1968 and a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition in 2001. His music often juxtaposes contrasting musical styles and includes symbolic, mystical, and theatrical elements. Adkins was hooked.

asked him what I should study if I wanted to be a composer. He suggested counterpoint, for one thing. Actually, we mostly just smoked cigarettes for a little bit and looked at the squirrels. But it was awesome—I'll never forget it."

By then, Adkins had feet firmly planted in two worlds—traditional Appalachian music and contemporary classical music. To this day he good-naturedly describes his own musical compositions as "George Crumb meets George Jones."

"Often people from the Appalachian musical tradition look down on 'paper-trained musicians,'" Adkins says. Likewise, he recognizes that many outside the tradition believe the music of the mountains "suggests a certain class, a particular educational level."

Joe Adkins, the teen who dropped out of St. Albans High School, has no trepidation about formal education. Like some of the graduates from that other St. Albans, in Washington, D.C., he next attended the University of Virginia, where he received a master of arts degree in musical composition.

After graduating from UVA, Adkins again proved his mettle by stepping into the void. "After receiving my master's degree, I spent almost

them. I would sometimes make up characters and then draw or paint them so they could keep me company," Adkins says. "That's pretty creepy now that I think about it."

Creepy or not, one can easily imagine Adkins's mind as an alchemist's laboratory. Take artist heroes like Albrecht Dürer or Maurice Sendak; include Chinese and Japanese scroll painters; add influences from musical composers Charles Ives, Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, Tōru Takemitsu, and George Crumb; mix in Hank Williams, George Jones, Merle Haggard, and Robin Kessinger; commingle the Appalachian storytelling tradition with the seventeenth-century Chinese author Pu Songling (who wrote *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*), the Brothers Grimm, and the twentieth-century Japanese children's literature author Kenji Miyazawa; amalgamate a little Tim Burton; and the stage is set for an innovative undertaking.

In December 2013 Adkins graduated from the doctoral program in music, again at the University of Virginia, with a degree in composition and computer technologies.

"The composition faculty at UVA is leading-edge, and some of my fantastic composer colleagues—

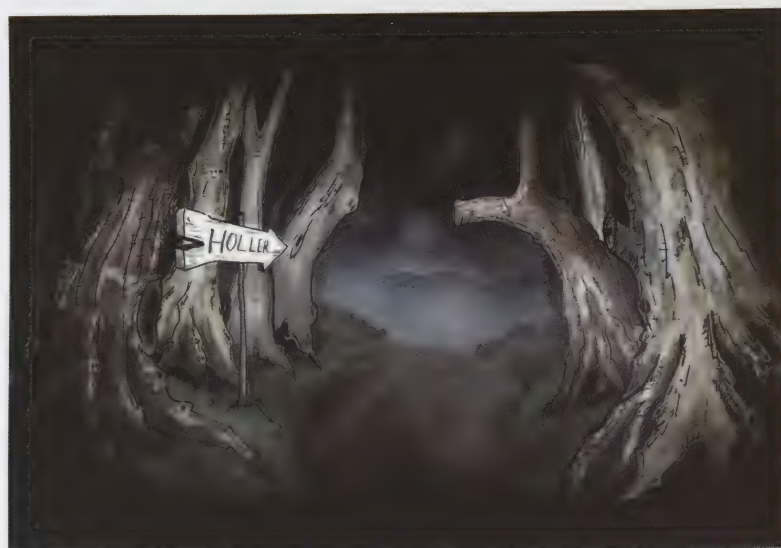
some of whom have moved on to other institutions—are doing incredibly interesting work with music and technology: computer music, video games, and musical robots. Personally, I tend to compose for acoustic instruments, but I often combine this aspect of my work with new media such as digital animation and art.”

For Adkins’s final dissertation project, he once again took a road less traveled. Up until recently, he shied away from combining classical and country or Appalachian traditional music—but no more. His dissertation project is called *Strange Tales from Appalachia*.

It combines three folk stories Adkins was told as a child. He is quick to explain that the three stories are “points of departure.” Titled *Pammanottus*, *Uncle Tiny’s Frog*, and *Yawgeetaw*, each story’s score can also be performed as a live chamber piece for small ensemble and narrator.

“My family was not exactly known for being avid readers, but I think we have a rich oral tradition, crazy capacity for memorization, and a unique sense of comedy,” Adkins says. “The story of *Pammanottus* is very loosely based on an existing and somewhat controversial story called *Epamanondas and His Auntie*. I remember Meemaw telling us this story when we were kids. My remake is significantly different from the original in many ways.

“*Uncle Tiny’s Frog* is about a possibly-alcoholic, country music-singing frog that lives in a shoebox



A scene from Adkins’s *Pammanottus*. Courtesy of Joe Adkins.

and sings for quarters. He belts out some George Jones and comes complete with a tiny frog crew cut.

“My Great-Grandpa, Wronsford Evans, used to tell us a story about a mythical town called Yawgeetaw, and we’d always go out in the woods to look for it. We never did find it, but the last of the three stories in this collection is also called *Yawgeetaw*—a lost town in the woods that turns out to be a hibernarium for some celestial life forms.”

Asked whether *Strange Tales from Appalachia* could be called a *Peter and the Wolf* for the twenty-first century, Adkins says, “In a way it is like *Peter and the Wolf* in that it’s a musical drama intended for children of all ages. However, *Strange Tales* draws from many different cultural influences made

possible by the post-modern world. I wouldn’t ever imagine that my work approaches Prokofiev’s. It would be nice, though, if some contemporary classical music could reach a broader audience than seems typical these days. I think storytelling is a great medium for this purpose.”

Cross-cultural musician, digital age composer, animator, and storyteller, Joe Adkins is a Renaissance man comfortable in his own skin. He brings to mind something George Jones once said: “Be real about what you do. Stay true to the voice inside you.”

There is little doubt that Adkins, the valedictorian of his G.E.D. class and University of Virginia doctoral graduate, will do just that. ♦

Randy Sanders is managing editor of *Now & Then*.



MOONSHINE BLUES (THE SONG OF RUTH WELLS)

SAVANNAH SIPPLE

Mama's in the hen house,
Daddy's at the creek,
I'm doing homework in my room,
so that one day I can leave.
Cousin's in the jailhouse,
Uncle's at the bank.

He's gonna try and bail him out,
but Cousin, he's no saint.
Teachers in the schoolyard,
they tell me I'm so wise,
but brains ain't gonna get me far
unless I cut off all these ties.

Boyfriend's got a fast car,
he takes me for a spin,
but I ain't got no time for falling
in love with mountain men.
I wanna live a fast life,
I wanna run away,

but there's something bout the mountains
that's holding me in place.
I wanna live my own life,
but today I am afraid
of leaving here and gettin out.
What if I can't make my own way?

Savannah Sipple is from Beattyville, Kentucky. Her work has been featured in *The Louisville Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and *New Southerner*.

MUSICAL JOURNEYS AND IMPROBABLE CONNECTIONS: AN APPALACHIAN-HAWAIIAN KINSHIP

JACK TOTTLE



The band Bluegrass Jack at the Nanbu Cafe, Kapa'au, North Kohala, Hawaii. L to R: Charlie Erck (dobro), Chris Wejrowski (U-bass), Jack Tottle (mandolin), Anne Pontius (guitar), and Steve Ryan (banjo). Charlie Erck and Steve Ryan have performed on different occasions with Jack not only in Hawaii but also at the A. P. Carter Family Fold, and in Tennessee. Photo courtesy author.

The late singer and storyteller Clyde “Kindy” Sproat (1930-2008) was born in true rural isolation, hours from the nearest road. Transportation was by mule. His father did manual labor. His mother played music and sang to the children each night after supper. Early on Kindy began singing and absorbing old songs like a sponge.

Upon retiring after twenty years in the U. S. Army, Kindy performed at New York’s Carnegie Hall and Washington, D.C.’s National Folklife Festival as well as such diverse locales as Seattle, Los Angeles, Louisville, El Paso, the Cook Islands, Japan, and throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

In his travels he met North Carolina guitarist Doc Watson, who shared Kindy’s love of traditional song and storytelling. “I met Doc at the Washington, D.C., festival,” Kindy told me in 1999, “and Doc invited me to travel to

Tennessee and do a festival with him there.”

By the time Kindy died, the genial storyteller and songster was said to have had a repertoire of 400 songs. A prestigious singing contest bearing his name continues to draw appreciative audiences each year.

Kindy Sproat’s early life experiences could have been those of a traditional Appalachian musician. However, Kindy’s home was actually more than 4,000 miles from the U. S. mainland’s Mountain South. He was born in a remote valley of North Kohala district on Hawaii’s Big Island. His full name was Clyde “Kindy” Halema’uma’u Sproat.

The island of Oahu, with a population of 950,000, contains the majority of the state’s people and is home to its capital, Honolulu. Kindy’s home island, the Big Island of Hawaii, is much larger but more sparsely populated.

The coastlines of Hawaii are tropical and warm, some sandy like the tourism posters, some comprised of lava

rock. On the Big Island the volcanic summits are chilly moonscapes and subject to snowfall in winter. Elsewhere the island encompasses arid desert, tropical rainforest, coffee plantations, orchards, and farms. A proud cowboy or *paniolo* tradition centers on the upland cattle country with its famous 175,000-acre Parker Ranch.

Looking past surface differences, I would unhesitatingly suggest that the multiracial and mixed-race Hawaiians (a blend of Asians, Anglo/Europeans, and native Hawaiians) are close cousins—both musically and in spirit—to those of us with ties to Appalachia. Here's why.

Steel Guitar

On the island of Oahu in 1885, so the story goes, an eleven-year-old school boy named Joseph Kekuku (1874-1932) slid a metal knife blade, or perhaps a loose bolt from a railroad track, across the strings of his guitar. He soon became fascinated by the unique swooping musical phrases he could construct in this way. By high school he had elevated his guitar strings well above the fingerboard for a clearer sound. In the shop at Honolulu's Kamehameha School for Boys, he constructed a steel bar specifically designed for noting the instrument cleanly.

Little could young Joseph have guessed that his ideas would capture the imagination of countless musicians around the globe and would be a leading factor in a craze for Hawaiian-style songs and steel guitar techniques on the U. S. mainland. Further, his concepts would play important roles within genres that did not yet exist: commercial country music, western swing, and bluegrass.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Hawaiian steel guitarists were already starting to travel to mainland America. Such luminaries

as Frank Ferrera, David Ka'iili, Benny "King" Nawahi, Dick McIntyre, Sol Ho'opi'i, and dozens of others made the long voyage. Major shows in New York and San Francisco in 1912 and 1915 exposed the instrument to large numbers of Americans, and—along with the newly popular Hawaiian ukulele—paved the way for pop music hits like "Fair Hawaii," "Along the Way to Waikiki," "Sweet Hawaiian Moonlight," "Aloha Oe (Farewell to Thee)," and many more.

The Father of Country Music

Mississippian Jimmie Rodgers (1897-1933), known as The Father of Country Music, had not yet been discovered—along with the A. P. Carter Family—at "The Big Bang of Country Music," the famed 1927 Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia, recording sessions. However, by the mid-1920s Rodgers had toured briefly with a Hawaiian-style vaudeville troupe. Immediately before the Bristol Sessions, Rodgers had been with another group, the Tenneva Ramblers, pictures of which show him playing, in one case, a Hawaiian steel guitar, and in another, a Hawaiian ukulele.

Once Rodgers's recording career got underway, both steel guitar and ukulele became part of the mix. His first steel player in 1928 was mainland-born Ellsworth T. Cozzens (uncle of subsequently renowned bluegrass dobro player Mike Auldridge).

In the years that followed, a series of Hawaiian-born steel guitarists were featured on Rodgers' records. These included Joe Kaipō, Charles Kama, David Kanui, and an unnamed member of Lani McIntire's Hawaiians. In 1931 Kentuckian Cliff Carlisle and Texas resident Billy Burke each did some nice steel work on separate Rodgers sessions, in which they played instrumental reprises of Rodgers' yodel. Similar phrases were often heard on later

recordings by Hawaiians and by mainland country players as well.

In 1933 Jimmie Rodgers died of tuberculosis, his stardom limited to six short years. Late in that same decade, however, another major star emerged in a context that featured the Hawaiian-style steel guitar sound even more prominently.

The King of Country Music

East Tennessean Roy Acuff (1903-1992) joined Nashville's Grand Ole Opry in 1938. "The King of Country Music" became a huge star in the early 1940s with hits such as "The Wabash Cannonball" and "The Great Speckled Bird." Acuff continued as a formidable presence on the Opry and in the country music business until his death.

One of Acuff's band members, Beecher Ray "Pete" Kirby (1911-2002), had previously traveled north from his East Tennessee home to Flint, Michigan, in search of factory work. There he met Hawaiian musician Rudy Waikiki, whose playing inspired Pete to buy a metal National Hawaiian guitar. Eventually Pete returned to East Tennessee and later joined Roy Acuff's Smoky Mountain Boys. Dubbed "Bashful Brother Oswald" by Acuff, Pete became a beloved musical icon who played dobro—a re-engineered version of the Hawaiian steel guitar—on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry for decades.

In the words of Mark Humphrey in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*:

The shimmering cry of . . . Oswald's dobro was an essential part of the signature sound of Roy Acuff's Smoky Mountain Boys for more than a half century . . . His Hawaiian-style playing underlined the pathos of such Acuff performances as

"The Precious Jewel," and it was Oswald's persistent presence on radio, record, and stage that saved the dobro, a missing link between acoustic Hawaiian and electric steel guitars, from likely oblivion after World War II preempted production.

Prior to 1955 when Josh Graves introduced his blues-inflected dobro style into Flatt and Scruggs's bluegrass sound, Oswald was the one dobro player that every country music fan knew. Well into his later years, Oswald retained Hawaiian techniques and even recorded Hawaiian tunes.

The Music Comes Full Circle

As a young boy in Lima, Ohio, during the 1930s, Jerry Byrd (1920-2005) was inspired to learn the steel guitar after seeing a group of Hawaiian players at a traveling tent show. By 1939 he was a full-time member of Kentucky's Renfro Valley Barn Dance. As he said in a 1973 interview:

I listened to the Hawaiians because they were really the only ones who were playing the steel guitar at that time. Dick McIntyre was my particular favorite although there were so many great ones . . . Andy Iona, Sam Koki, Sol Ho'opi'I . . . all of them contributed to steel guitar. You couldn't play Hawaiian music in the middle of Ohio so you played the next thing to come along which was country music. I know Joaquin Murphy out in California picked up a lot of his stuff from Sol Ho'opi'I.

Roy Wiggins got a lot of his stuff from Hawaiians—that was the only place you heard it.

The steel guitar Byrd played was—in keeping with the times—electrified as a way to project its sound. By the 1950s he had played with numerous stars from Red Foley, Ernest Tubb, and Hank Williams to Chet Atkins and Patti Page. Byrd also recorded hundreds of tunes under his own name and became one of the most admired steel players in country music.

By 1971 Jerry Byrd had become dissatisfied with the direction country music was taking in Nashville and decided to move to the island of Oahu. There he performed and taught a new generation of Hawaiians to play Hawaiian music on the steel guitar. To mention his name to Hawaiian steel players today is to tap into a strain of boundless admiration bordering on worship—the view many bluegrass players have toward Earl Scruggs or Bill Monroe. As Hawaii's U. S. Congressional representative entered in the 1989 *Congressional Record*: "In Hawaiian steel guitar circles, Jerry is known simply as The Great One. Thousands throughout the world have enjoyed his singular musical skill, which brings forth the fantasies and realities of our Island paradise: perfumes of tropical flowers, swaying palms, pounding surf, colorful rainbows, surfers, and hula maidens. More importantly, Jerry's steel strings evoke our Hawaiian spirit of aloha."

Values in Song, Story, and Dance

Hawaiians, like the people of Appalachia, take fierce pride in the

unique qualities of their culture. Therefore, many may not welcome a comparison with another group.

It is nevertheless true that aspects of the rural Hawaiian experience—as suggested by the Kindy Sproat story—parallel those of more than a few folks who have grown up in the Appalachian region. Living in small communities isolated from urban centers has encouraged people in each culture to make their own home-grown music which embodies their lives, their emotions, and what they hold dear.

Both in Hawaii and in the Mountain South of the U. S. mainland, audiences enjoy heartfelt songs of love, faith, home, natural beauty, family, and nostalgic reflections on days past. Thus the movement of musical ideas back and forth across the ocean should not surprise us any more than does the banjo's African origin or the ukulele's Portuguese ancestry.

So it is that visitors to Southwest Virginia's Carter Family Fold or to West Hawaii's Full Moon Festival at the Big Island's Mauna Kea resort receive a remarkably similar gift: a Saturday evening treat combining traditional music, dance, and stories in an informal, good-natured, and welcoming environment.

Whether it is staged in the mountain homeland of the Carter Family or in view of a breathtaking Pacific Ocean sunset, the event nurtures the souls of those who have grown up in the culture and draws newcomers into the authentic spirit of the region. As it has for generations, sharing through music helps us appreciate that, at the deepest level, we all are part of one great family. ❖



BLUEGRASS MUSIC IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

J. P. MATHES II



Leona and J.P. Mathes (far left) perform in Japan. Photo courtesy author.

My wife Leona and I spent the summer of 2013 performing, traveling, and eating our way across the Japanese archipelago. Leona is a Tokyo native. I am a banjo player, and Leona is a fiddler. We played fourteen concerts and led two college workshops during our time in Japan. We met many old friends during our tour and made many new young friends who will be the next generation of bluegrass musicians in Japan. This was my thirteenth visit there.

With Tokyo as our base, we could leave early in the morning on the highly efficient Shinkansen (bullet train) and reach our destination halfway across the country in three or four hours. Our hosts would usually greet us with a visit to a local restaurant. In Japan each region, even each town, has a special food it is known for, so we indulged in many local dishes. All of the meals were outrageously delicious. Music is our life, and food is our hobby. After a fine meal, we would perform with local musicians or conduct a workshop, go back to the train, and return to our apartment in Tokyo's Shibuya district.

Bluegrass music caught on in Japan largely because of radio. Specifically, Armed Forces Radio after World War II introduced Japanese citizens to the music of Elvis Presley, Chet Atkins, Bill Monroe and The Bluegrass Boys, and many other American artists.

Leona's father, Hirofumi "Dr. K" Tokutake, is one of the most popular American roots guitarists in Japan, and his story begins with his father and a home radio. Leona's grandfather was a novice electronics technician who was able to alter his home radio to pick up the American broadcasts, so Leona's father heard the music of Les Paul, Merle Travis, and many others. He became obsessed with these new sounds and was eventually able to find a guitar and make a lifelong career playing the music he loved. Leona said, "Without my grandfather's interest in electronics, I would not be a musician."

There is a myth I have heard many times that "bluegrass music is huge in Japan." But that is not actually the case. Bluegrass is popular in certain areas of Japan, but it is not comparable to rock, J-pop (Japanese

pop), or even jazz. Nevertheless, Japan still ranks third in popularity of bluegrass, behind the U.S. and Canada. Bluegrass fans and musicians in Japan are very serious about their music. The Japanese term *otaku*, which roughly means "a person with obsessive interests," is the best way to describe these fans. The level of knowledge and the intensity of passion about bluegrass are evident at any of the nearly 100 bluegrass festivals held yearly in Japan.

Japanese bluegrass bands echo Earl Scruggs's banjo on "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" and the voices of The Stanley Brothers as they sing "Rank Strangers." It is fascinating that halfway around the world, these traditions that flourished in Appalachia live on in a culture that is so different. I am captivated when I visit Tokyo, a city and a culture seemingly of the future, and I walk into a club and hear the music of The Carter Family.

In Japan the pipelines that supply new musicians are the college bluegrass clubs. Japan has several universities where bluegrass music is an official club activity. Each student attending a university must participate in club activities. Most of these clubs have more than 100 students playing banjo, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, bass, and the resonophonic guitar. Some of the most prominent bluegrass clubs are sponsored by Kobe University, Sapporo University, Tohoku University, and Nagoya University. Former students who played bluegrass and attended these schools founded the clubs. Volunteers,

who are generally alumni, teach the current students. The bluegrass clubs recruit students during freshman orientation, and many of them have no idea what bluegrass music is prior to joining the club.

We held a college workshop at Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, traveling there on the newest Shinkansen at speeds close to 198 miles per hour. When we arrived at the Sendai station, we were met by one of the fourth-year students who escorted us to the college for our workshop. But first we had to eat the local food specialty called *gyutan* (grilled beef tongue), which was surprisingly good. Then our escort took us to see a mountain view of the city near a local shrine. The view was breathtaking, but my attention was drawn to the barren shoreline in the distance as I pondered the devastation caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. The school remained unaffected because of its location on the mountaintop.

After we maneuvered through hundreds of bicycles in the school's parking area, we arrived in a classroom with about forty students, and everyone was working together to get our P.A. system ready for the workshop. We conducted individual classes on the banjo and fiddle and held a band coaching seminar with a couple of student ensembles. We were supposed to find fault in their performances, but we could identify very few mistakes. I could tell they had practiced the material vigorously, and they performed nearly flawlessly. After watching these students perform for us, I was reminded of what made me want

to teach bluegrass music and what made me love Japan. This experience propelled me back twelve years.

While I was a student at East Tennessee State University, I was fortunate enough to be part of the ETSU Bluegrass Band, which toured Japan in 2001. On our tour I was surprised at how many musicians our age attended the festivals. I chose to stay behind in Japan for an extra week after our other members returned home. My host family, Sab and Yuriko Inoue, suggested I go to Kobe University's summer bluegrass band camp. I was skeptical about attending alone, but I agreed to go. This was my first time traveling abroad, and as a young man from Appalachia, I must admit I was way outside my element, but I knew the trip was a great opportunity to expand my horizons. So I took advantage of every chance for new experiences.

I arrived at the train station to meet my driver, who would take me to the traditional Japanese inn where the band camp was being held. When we arrived, I was amazed at the location. It was an inn connected to an ancient temple, and monks maintained the grounds. Once I walked into the common area where over 100 students my age were rehearsing bluegrass, I felt at home. After seeing the dedication and passion of the volunteer teachers, I knew at that moment I wanted to teach and share bluegrass music with the world. Despite the language barrier, I made many new friends, and we still meet each time I return to Japan. That experience changed my life. ♦

J.P. Mathes II is the ensembles director and an assistant professor at Hazard Community & Technical College's Kentucky School of Bluegrass and Traditional Music in Hyden. He is from Elizabethton, Tennessee. Leona Mathes is a violin and fiddle instructor at Trinity Arts Center in Johnson City, Tennessee, and an instructor at the East Tennessee Japanese School in Maryville. She is from Tokyo.



RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT: A GREAT MUSICAL MIGRATION

DANIEL BONER

My growing up in the fertile farm country of southern New Jersey in the latter part of the twentieth century was, in many ways, akin to living in an Appalachian community. Microcultures developed as Southern Appalachian migrants found themselves alongside co-workers with shared stories of making the long journey up U.S. Route 11. I cannot count the times I've heard the questions: "So, what year did your people move up here?" or "Which part of West Virginia is your dad from?"

Cumberland County, New Jersey, was home to four Freewill Baptist churches, all within ten miles of each other. Congregations brought with them traditions of charismatic worship, which encouraged participants to "let the Lord lead them" in unscripted exaltation. They brought their music, too. Sunday night singings, summertime homecomings, and social gatherings featured near-professional-level performers that included regional favorites comprised of southern transplants such as the Shining Lights, the Glory Echoes, and the bluegrass-styled Strings of Gospel and the King's Countrymen.

Anyone interested in bluegrass or traditional country music could find it in the county seat, Bridgeton, or in nearby townships and boroughs. In a jam session, you might trade licks with Cecil West, Bill Brown, Rufus Hill, Charlie Horseman, Fred Hannah, or Troy Spencer. While in their prime, any one of them could have traded his factory job for full-time musical employment. Many of them would recall



Del McCoury at the Chicken Coop, Bridgeton, New Jersey, circa 1962. Photo courtesy Ivan Sexton.

stories of the numerous times they declined serious offers to work with Bill Monroe, Reno and Smiley, or the Osborne Brothers because of the financial uncertainty of life on the road. Most all of these larger-than-life personalities exist now only in memories from my youth. Yet musicians leave behind much more than their instruments. I can hear my fiddle teacher, Cecil, every time my bow touches the strings.

I returned to South Jersey in August of 2013 to research the musical migration that resulted in my own youthful interest in bluegrass and country music. I spent a memorable week visiting with old friends and family and even tuned up a few instruments that had been hiding dormant under beds for years. By the end, I was heading back to Tennessee with a hard drive full of audio interviews, scanned photos, letters, and the phone number of an old friend, Ivan Sexton, one of the last remaining musicians from the aforementioned generation of South Jersey musical patriarchs.

The last time I saw Ivan was in the summer of 2003. While on tour, the band I was performing with stopped in Bridgeton to play a show before continuing on to New York City. At the intermission, I invited him to do a song with us during the second set. As was the case any time Ivan stepped up to a microphone, he instantly commanded the audience's attention and delivered a powerful rendition of "Peace in the Valley." His performance brought the listeners to their feet, even

before he finished the last phrase.

Ivan and his wife Doris relocated to Catawba, Virginia, just prior to her death in 2008. A quick phone call during my trip home was all it took to schedule a chance for us reconnect. As I turned into his driveway, it was apparent that ten years had changed his physical appearance, although only slightly. He was standing on his front porch steps with a lone beagle at his feet.

"Her name is Kentucky," he told me, having named her after his home state. "That's the only dog I've ever had that would mind me."

He was born in Drift, in Floyd County, in 1933 to a mother who played pump organ and a coal-mining, Church of God-preaching father who would eventually succumb to black lung. Music was around his home, church, and on the Grand Ole Opry by battery radio, and soon Ivan found his voice singing country and gospel songs of the day. He recalled watching Bill Monroe perform twice in 1940 and being allowed into the shows for free in return for chasing after foul balls hit by the Blue Grass Boys baseball team. But with jobs scarce in Eastern Kentucky, he and his parents relocated to Rosenhayn, New Jersey, to find work.

Ivan invited me downstairs where he hosts jam sessions. Hanging on the walls were photos and memorabilia, some in decades-old frames covered with dust. There were photos of Ivan with his bands from over the years, pictures of him with Del McCoury from the early 1960s, and framed contracts signed by Bill Monroe, Ralph Stanley, and Ernest Tubb. A worn poster from a 1974 country concert at the Dover Downs stood out with headliners

George Jones and Tammy Wynette. Directly beneath their photos on the poster were the words, "Ivan Sexton and the Just Country Band."

"That was probably the highlight of my music career, I guess," Ivan said. "Although, I enjoyed playing with [Bill] Monroe and Lester [Flatt] and Earl [Scruggs]. They were there at the Chicken Coop a couple times."

The Chicken Coop was Bridgeton's local "watering hole," as Ivan described it. While not a particularly fancy establishment, for South Jersey bluegrass and country music lovers it was as important as the Station Inn has been to the Nashville bluegrass audience. The best artists in the business were attracted to the Chicken Coop, and Ivan was there to back them up.

"There's a lot of the stars out of Nashville that I got to play with. The big names, they were there, and sometimes four or five times. During that time, the artists would come back just about every year. And I got to play with all of them. Like Conway Twitty. I got to do about five shows with him. We were the house band."

"Of course, Del McCoury played the banjo with me there at the Chicken Coop. He played two winters with me, Del did, and when he left me he went with Monroe. Ted Lundy played there with me. Don Reno was there. I did probably about three shows with Ernest Tubb. Then I started booking Sunset Park and played it for seven or eight years. I did the Wheeling Jamboree with Alex [Campbell] and Ola Belle [Reed] maybe three or four times."

Rock and roll dominated the 1950s and '60s. Nevertheless, record labels and radio stations still met the demands of transplanted southerners who preferred the Nashville sound.

Bluegrass and country artists expanded their tours to reach northeastern audiences at venues such as the Chicken Coup, Sunset Park, and the New River Ranch. Ivan worked with Cecil West, Bob Paisley, Ted Lundy, Fred Hannah, Rufus Hill, Johnny Lubonki, and Johnny Langley on the weekly "Country Rhythm Time" program for Bridgeton's WSNJ-AM/FM radio.

It was Ivan who suggested the move of the Delaware Bluegrass Festival from Gloryland Park in Bear, Delaware, to the Salem County Fairground in Woodstown, New Jersey. Carl Goldstein, the festival director, also credits him for renaming it the Delaware Valley Bluegrass Festival. Ivan still performs at the festival every other year, a standing invitation he shares with Bob Paisley.

As Ivan and I finished our conversation, we reflected on the unique opportunity of living in a community that was able to share its culture with a new and appreciative audience. We also acknowledged that South Jersey, like many heterogeneous regions of the Northeast, experiences cultural turnover much more quickly than it occurs in Appalachia. The post-World War II generation is nearly gone, families have returned south, and the local radio stations have all but ceased playing bluegrass and traditional country music.

"If you had it to do all over again, you would have a hard time this day and time," Ivan says. "To learn what you learned back then. I think I'm fortunate. When I came along, everything was happening then. You know, Don Reno, Earl Scruggs, and Lester Flatt, and you name it. I was right in the middle of it." ♦



Various Artists

The Big E: A Salute to Steel Guitarist Buddy Emmons

Music Producers Institute

Buddy Emmons developed the steel guitar as we know it today. Born in Mishawaka, Indiana, in 1937, he began playing a six-string lap steel guitar at age eleven. After playing with bands around South Bend and northern Indiana, he dropped out of school at sixteen to play with Stony Calhoun in Calumet City, Illinois. At seventeen, he joined Casey Clark's Lazy Ranch Boys in Detroit, where he began playing the pedal steel guitar.

Emmons went from Detroit to Nashville, where he joined Little Jimmy Dickens and recorded "Raising the Dickens" and "Buddy's Boogie," now steel guitar standards. After Dickens broke up his band to go solo, Emmons and Shot Jackson formed the Sho-Bud Company to design and build steel guitars. Their innovations changed the way steel guitars are played.

Emmons went on to play with Ernest Tubb and Ray Price; formed a new company, the Emmons Guitar Company; moved to California to work sessions with Roger Miller, Nancy Sina-

tra, Ray Charles, and many others; and moved back to Nashville to work with such notables as Mel Tillis, Donna Fargo, John Hartford, George Strait, and the Everly Brothers. He retired in 2007 after the death of his wife Peggy.

Grammy Award-winning producer Steve Fishell assembled an impressive lineup of steel guitarists and singers, including four Country Music Hall of Fame members, for this tribute to Emmons. A sixteen-page booklet outlines the many technical and musical innovations he brought to the music. ♦



Tim O'Brien and Darrell Scott *Memories and Moments*

Full Skies

The last "studio" album from Tim O'Brien and Darrell Scott, the 2000 release *Real Time*, wasn't actually recorded in a studio; they recorded the songs in Scott's living room. With a mix of original songs, traditional tunes, and a couple of Hank Williams classics, *Real Time* had the feel of two friends making music naturally at home, entertaining themselves as people have done for gen-

erations. Last year's *We're Usually A Lot Better Than This* was recorded live at the Grey Eagle in Asheville, North Carolina, in 2005 and 2006 and retained the informality of *Real Time* while adding the unpredictability of live performance, allowing a spontaneity that seemed to surprise and delight the performers as much as it did the audience.

Their latest effort, *Memories and Moments*, released on their newly-formed Full Skies label, was recorded in a real studio over three days with Scott serving as producer. The sound is basic and live; there are no overdubs or extras. Scott and O'Brien contributed five songs each, along with one collaboration, the anti-mountaintop removal "Keep Your Dirty Lights On." Another coal-related song is John Prine's "Paradise," to which Prine himself adds vocals. With covers of Hank Williams's "Alone and Forsaken" and George Jones's "Just One More," *Memories and Moments* is sure to become an Americana classic, especially as O'Brien and Scott have devoted the year after its release to touring together. The sound this duo creates is, as Scott says, "bigger than the sum of our parts, and our parts are pretty good to begin with." ♦



Si Kahn and The Looping Brothers
Aragon Mill: The Bluegrass Sessions
 Strictly Country Records

Musician, author, and activist Si Kahn celebrates two milestones in 2014: his seventieth birthday and the fortieth anniversary of his recording debut. In 1974, Kahn released *New Wood* on the June Appal label, operated by Appalshop, the non-profit arts and education organization in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Since then, he has released a total of seventeen albums. As an activist, he has worked for causes ranging from prison reform to opposing mountaintop removal. He recently retired as director of the group he founded, Grassroots Leadership, which advocates for many of these causes. Roseanne Cash compares Kahn to Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, and to her father, "who shared his righteous sense of humanity and his love of the 'meek,' who he truly believed would 'inherit the earth.'"

In anticipation of his birthday and his fortieth year as a recording artist, Kahn has released a "greatest hits" collection. But he was not content simply to re-package old recordings; he re-recorded twelve of his favorites, along with three previously unrecorded songs,

with a German bluegrass band, The Looping Brothers. The title cut, "Aragon Mill," was on Kahn's 1974 debut album and is still relevant forty years later; it is sung from the viewpoint of a worker at a mill that has left town "and it ain't coming back." As bluegrass singer Laurie Lewis writes in the introduction, Kahn's "deep respect and love for 'ordinary' working men and women shines through in this collection."

The Looping Brothers are veteran bluegrass performers who provide fine, traditional, hard-driving accompaniment to the songs in this collection. The next-to-last song in the set is from Kahn's debut album, "Gone, Gonna Rise Again," which he often uses to open his concerts. The closing selection is "What Will I Leave," an *a cappella* song which often closes his concerts: "When I am gone, who'll carry on/ What will I leave behind?"

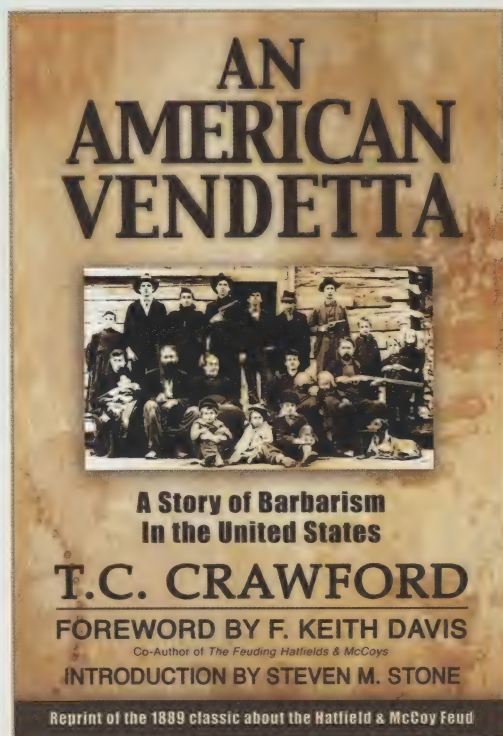
For Si Kahn, the answer, aside from a half-century of social activism, is partially contained in this collection. ♦



The Worthless Son-in-Laws
No. 8 Wire
 Orchard Hill Media

Six years after the release of their debut album, the quartet from Boone, North Carolina, has a new album. According to singer and songwriter Jimmy Davidson, *No. 8 Wire* was recorded in a "real studio, with a professional engineer and producer," Mitch Easter. Easter is the former singer and songwriter for Let's Active and producer for R.E.M., Wilco, Drive-By Truckers, and others. The Worthless Son-in-Laws' first album, *Sort of Back to Having a Life*, won the band some critical success and comparisons to the Jayhawks, Son Volt, the dBs, and other roots-pop and alt-country bands. But six years of playing together around the High Country of western North Carolina have fused the band into what Davidson calls "a unit—I don't know how to describe it, but after this long together we function like a single organism." Their only hiatus was a year that Davidson took off to live in New Zealand, an experience that provided the title for the album. Sometimes short on materials, New Zealanders claimed they could fix anything with No. 8 fencing wire, sort of the equivalent of duct tape. *No. 8 Wire* is a good collection of songs from this High Country quartet, and we can only hope it won't take six years before they release another. ♦

Wayne Winkler is music reviews editor for *Now & Then*.



An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States

T. C. Crawford

Chapmanville, West Virginia: Woodland Press, 2013

\$19.95 (paperback), 141 pages

"I have been away in Murderland for nearly ten days," reads the opening sentence of *An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States*. Written by New York journalist Theron C. Crawford in 1888 and 1889, and published in 1889 by Belford, Clarke and Company, the book is a first-hand account of Crawford's trip to West Virginia to report on the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys.

Call him brave or consider him foolhardy, Crawford came to West Virginia during the bloodiest year of the feud for the express purpose of interviewing "Devil Anse" Hatfield in his own "lair." The result is one of the earliest books to stamp the image of lawless, isolated mountaineers on the state's residents. Illustrated by a Mr. Graves, the book provides accounts of what Crawford witnessed, what he learned, and how he felt about the region.

Assisted and accompanied by John B. Floyd, then West Virginia's Assistant Secretary of State, Crawford set out from Charleston, West Virginia, for a pre-arranged meeting with the hearty fifty-year-old Anse Hatfield in his newly built fort/cabin high in the remote mountains of Logan County. Guided through the mountains on horseback, the pair travelled what Crawford called "the worst roads in the world." The October trip took them through heavy forests, up stream beds, and along deer paths, logging trails, and traces strewn with boulders and tree trunks. Cliffs were frightening, and falling rocks were a hazard. New York-style food and a private bed in decent lodging did not exist.

After days of bone-rattling travel, the visitors began to pass armed men "working" in fields: They were in the "Devil's" territory. Before long, Anse joined the men in the field and "helloed" his visitors. With true Scots clan hospitality, he welcomed his guests and invited them to stay for supper and spend the night. Crawford knew Anse was a successful businessman who "owned large tracks of land and was thoroughly well-to-do." He describes Anse as intelligent but not educated. He was definitely the head of his house, a crack shot, and a good provider for his wife and their twelve children, all living.

Crawford's remarks about Anse's humor, honesty, and respectability match existing local accounts. His description of the shyness and gracefulness of the Hatfield girls, and Anse's enjoyment of his latest three "babbies" ages two, four, and six, provide touching glimpses of a real family. The two-room cabin is described in detail, including the huge fireplace, colorful clean clothes suspended from rafters in the ceiling, and the neat row of sleeping cots covered with ruffles. Fewer details are included about the nearby fort and sleeping quarters for the guards, perhaps at Anse's request.

Mrs. Hatfield, as Crawford refers to her, is described as a cheerful woman, one who urges guests to eat heartily of food cooked over the open hearth fire: "corn pone, fried pork, snow-white butter, sweet-potatoes, sliced tomatoes, and the hard beans of the mountains." She obviously dotes on her husband and her children, especially son "Cap."

After the meal, the men sat circled around the

fire while Anse played with his “babbies” and talked about his willingness to end the feud. Cap, his most militant son, sometimes spoke his mind.

Crawford’s time at the Hatfield place was uneventful, but the small army of guards on constant patrol and the ever-present Winchester rifles made him uneasy. He began to question the wisdom of his visit to a region he labeled “Murderland.” Even though he found many of the Hatfields admirable, he abhorred the fact that law enforcement was almost nonexistent and that there were few churches, few schools, and little of what he called “culture.”

After the interview, he briefly travelled the region. Then, weary and suffering from indigestion and lack of sleep, he returned to New York. His friends rejoiced at his safe return from the “eye for an eye” land of the Hatfields.

Crawford’s articles about his experiences were breaking news. Now his work is a time capsule. The people are presented as products of their isolated place, a place depicted as barbaric while its people are not. There is much to learn from this first-hand journalistic account of life in the mountains of America. The reprint is a valuable addition to feud literature and to folklore scholarship. ♦

Phyllis Moore, who served as project director for the first West Virginia Literary Map, lives in Clarksburg, where she researches and writes about West Virginia’s literature.

The Always Broken Plates of Mountains

ROSE McLARNEY



The Always Broken Plates of Mountains

Rose McLarney

New York: Four Way Books, 2012

\$15.95 (paper), 70 pages

Rose McLarney grew up in rural western North Carolina, where she continues to live on an old mountain farm. Daughter to a somewhat legendary biologist who founded the international conservation organization Asociación ANAI, she is a female counterpart (a generation or two removed) of the Kentucky farmer/poet Wendell Berry. Her work poems have the pith, the profundity, the probing of Berry’s, and yet she is very much her own muse. She has taken the dictum of William Carlos Williams, “ideas only in things,” and catapulted it into new poetry.

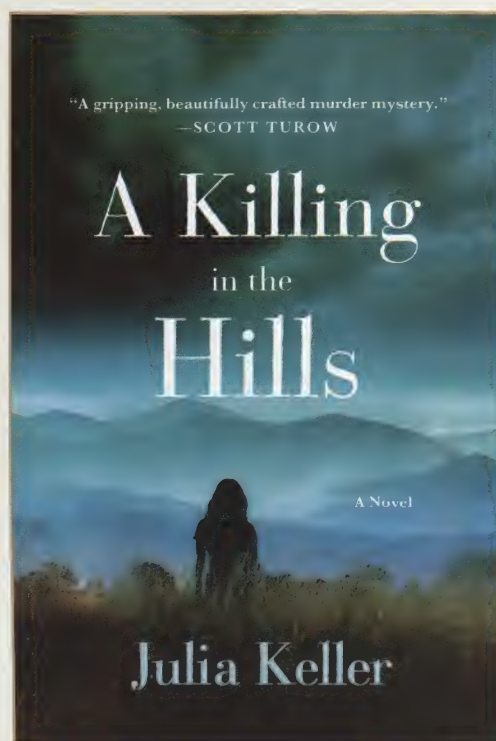
Among saxifrage, sumac, coriander, and blind gentians, Rose McLarney has made her home and her verse. And her first book, *The Always Broken Plates of Mountains*, is a reflection of her commitment to the rural landscape and lifestyle, from the cover photo’s striking head-on view of horses plowing to “Epilogue,” the last of this collection of poems in homage to the southern mountain landscape.

The forty-five poems in this book are love poems to nature, rural farm life, and to some lucky man. Their stern, matter-of-fact tenderness is reminiscent not only of Berry but of a poet from the early part of the last century, the Russian Anna Akhmatova.

McLarney blends her sentiments about love with the chores of living a rural farm life. She wields her pen to break through the obvious as effectively as she uses "a pickaxe to break through ice." Her image of "buffalo stabbing their horns into rolls of hay" is appropriate as a metaphor for how she attacks her material. Among high hills, hellbenders, and heartbreak is a woman emerging into the physical world of work and romance.

Like the wise old women in the concluding poem, "Epilogue," readers will learn from "setting a spell" with these poems that "make a magic of slowness" amid "the always broken plates of mountains." ♦

Thomas Crowe is the author of *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods* and *The End of Eden: Writings of an Environmental Activist*. He lives along the Tuckasegee River in western North Carolina.



A Killing in the Hills

Julia Keller

New York: Minotaur Books (St. Martin's Publishing Group), 2012

\$24.99 (hardcover), 371 pages

In *A Killing in the Hills*, the first mystery novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Julia Keller, the hills are more than just scenery. They provide a sense of place that both defines and confines the lives of the characters in the fictional Appalachian town of Acker's Gap. Keller, from West Virginia, fills the town with people struggling to take care of their families in a place that has too few jobs and too many drug dealers. The decisions these characters make—and have made—in the service of protecting and providing for their own force many of them to pay dearly.

Bell Elkins, the strong-minded prosecuting attorney of Raythune County, sees a disturbing new hierarchy of drug distribution taking root in Acker's Gap. Instead of local sellers, larger criminal operations are running the show. And while they use locals to push their goods, these larger operations prey on the desperation of the residents living in the economically depressed county to a previously unheard of degree. Bell, having grown up in Acker's Gap and recently

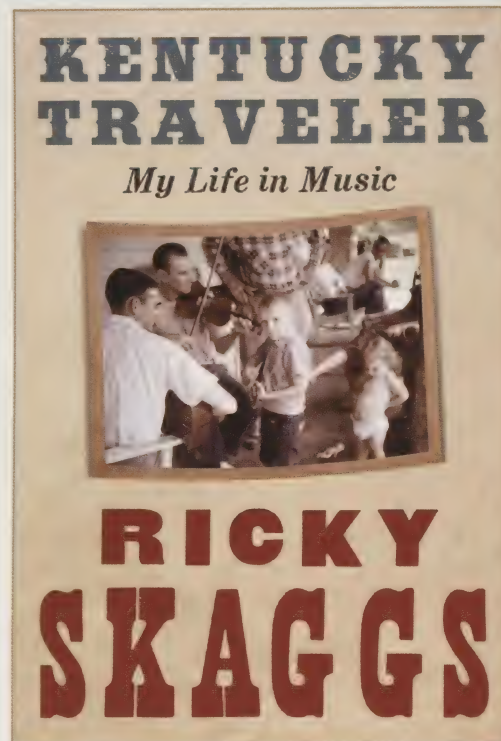
moved back with her teenage daughter Carla, is committed to trying to keep the kids in the town away from drugs. In a speech to a group of students at Carla's high school, Bell says she "know[s] what it's like to be a kid from West Virginia. . . . You feel like you don't matter, like nothing you ever do or say is going to matter. The world's a big closed door." Bell left her life in Washington, D.C., to try to wedge that door open, and now she has thrown herself into the effort.

The story is told in a series of alternating points of view. Bell, however, serves as the center that ties all the characters to each other and also provides them with a strong connection to Acker's Gap. The deep and abiding pull of place and past, as well as the strength of and stresses on familial bonds, are themes that run throughout the novel. The story suggests that what we do and what is done to us never really go away, and we are permanently marked by our own past like the "crooked thread" of an old scar. As we learn over the course of the novel, Bell has her own dark history, and the shadow of past violence shapes both her professional and personal life.

The mother-daughter dynamic in the novel adds momentum to the narrative and raises the personal stakes for the two main characters. For example, the reader sees the novel's inciting incident from Carla's perspective before learning her mother's reaction to it. Carla is waiting for Bell in a diner after attending a "court-mandated Teen Anger Management Workshop." Suddenly a man walks in and executes three elderly men sitting at a nearby table. This event sends Bell and her colleagues on a manhunt to catch the killer. Carla—unbeknownst to Bell—sets out on a mission of her own.

In *A Killing in the Hills*, Julia Keller depicts an Appalachian setting disrupted by drugs and crime. The "natural beauty" of the place is "undercut by the plight of the human beings forced to live in the midst of it." Her lead character, Prosecutor Bell Elkins, sees both the beauty and the horror of Acker's Gap and fights not only for her own and her daughter's lives but for the life of the town. ♦

Rebecca Fox-Gieg is a native of Huntington, West Virginia, and graduated with a master of fine arts in creative writing from The Ohio State University.



***Kentucky Traveler: My Life in Music*
Ricky Skaggs, with Eddie Dean**

Harper Collins 2013

\$25.99 (hardcover), 338 pages

In the 1970s, Washington, D.C., was called "the Bluegrass Capitol of the World" in recognition of the wide range of talented bluegrass musicians who either lived or regularly performed there. Bands based there included traditionalists (the Bluegrass Cardinals and the Johnson Mountain Boys) and progressive bluegrass ensembles (the Country Gentlemen and the Seldom Scene). Other bands based elsewhere regularly performed in Washington, D.C., venues, such as the Cellar Door, the Shamrock, the Red Fox Inn, and the Birchmere.

One of the most promising bluegrass talents during the 1970s was Ricky Skaggs, and Washington-area bluegrass fans heard and saw him frequently. A native of Cordell, Kentucky, he briefly lived just outside Washington, and he frequently returned there after he moved back to Kentucky. When he wasn't appearing in D.C. as part of Ralph Stanley's or J. D. Crowe's bands, or fronting Boone Creek, his own progressive bluegrass band, Skaggs performed as a sideman in concerts and on recordings with

the Country Gentlemen and the Seldom Scene. He seemed destined for fame and fortune—though to achieve the latter, it was inevitable he would need to leave bluegrass, which, as his autobiography *Kentucky Traveler* describes, is exactly what happened.

Shortly after playing in Emmylou Harris's L.A.-based Hot Band, Skaggs became a country music superstar, recording best-selling country albums and scoring nearly a dozen number-one singles on the *Billboard* Hot Country Songs chart. I attended one Skaggs concert during this period. On the heels of three hit country albums for Epic Records, he headlined a show at an outdoor fair in Boone, North Carolina. Although he had been tagged by Nashville music writers as a "new traditionalist," his "country" music sounded like 1970s-era California country rock. Every musician can have an off-day on what must sometimes seem like the "Endless Tour." Yet Skaggs that day seemed both nervous and bored. His on-stage banter came off as forced, and his music sounded slick, over-rehearsed, and underwhelming. I wasn't expecting that—I had loved his 1982 country album *Highways & Heartaches*. In *Kentucky Traveler*, Skaggs reveals that his frustration during this period stemmed from the fact that he wasn't able to play the music he truly loved the way it needed to be played: "[T]here was a big difference between my countrified cover versions [of bluegrass classics] and the real thing. There were bluegrass overtones in my music, especially the singing, but it wasn't bluegrass."

Skaggs's reign in country music sputtered after the rise of the so-called "class of '89" (with debut albums from Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, and Clint Black and major breakthroughs for two previously recorded acts, Vince Gill and Patty Loveless).

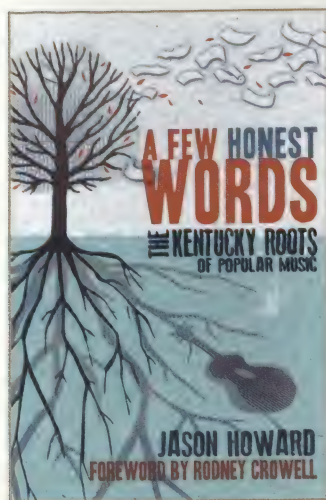
Skaggs reemerged in 1997 with the release of his album *Bluegrass Rules* on his own independent label, Skaggs Family Records. About this time, I attended a performance by Skaggs and his crackerjack band Kentucky Thunder at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium. Skaggs was clearly thrilled to be back in the bluegrass fold. Subsequently releasing sixteen albums (and counting) of consummately professional, yet passionately rendered traditional bluegrass, he has continued to honor his commitment to the "ancient tones" associated with Bill Monroe.

Because Skaggs's life and career trajectory are widely known, *Kentucky Traveler* offers few surprises. Through a string of anecdotes, the book illustrates how Skaggs's commitment to "faith, family, and

music" brought him back from a detour in mainstream country music to play Appalachian regional music like the elders who inspired him.

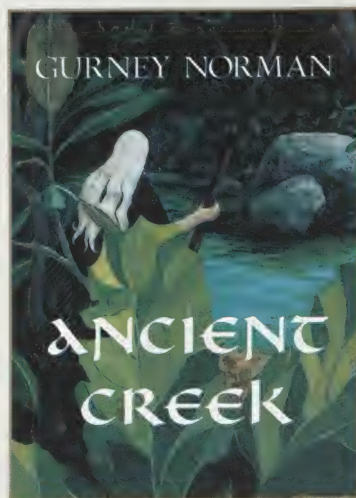
Kentucky Traveler takes every opportunity to thank the various people who helped Skaggs's career, but this tendency, however well-intentioned, becomes a distraction. Nonetheless, the book, co-written with music journalist Eddie Dean, is charming in its humility, directness, and sweetness of tone. It is refreshing to read about a musician whose career is defined not by financial success or by artistic prowess or by tragedy, but by happiness. ♦

Ted Olson has written several books, including *Blue Ridge Folklife*, a study of Appalachian culture, and two collections of poetry, *Breathing in Darkness* and *Revelations*.



A Few Honest Words: The Kentucky Roots of Popular Music
Jason Howard
University Press of Kentucky, 2012

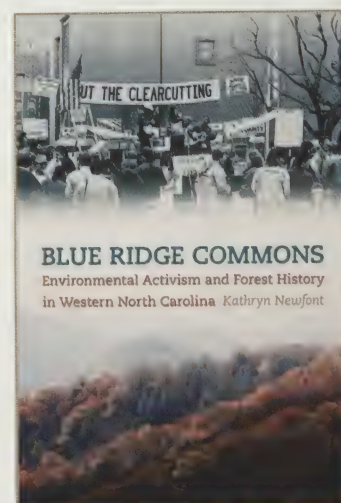
"I had been baptized in the river of roots music, submerged at the confluence of country, blues, rock, and gospel," says Jason Howard, whose new book defines roots music through his own words and those of contemporary country, folk, jazz, rap, rock, and gospel musicians. Biographical sketches drawn from interviews with musicians tell about their lives and connections to Kentucky and about how those connections affect their music. Among the musicians interviewed are Naomi Judd, Dwight Yoakam, Dale Ann Bradley, and the Watson Twins. All say they have been influenced by the landscape, culture, and traditions of Kentucky. Howard's work emphasizes what Naomi Judd refers to as the "cross-pollination" of literature and music. ♦



Ancient Creek: A Folktale
Gurney Norman
Old Cove Press 2012

In Norman's story, a mountain community rises up against "King George Condominium, III" when the king visits "Holiday Land" to breathe the pure mountain air and drink the pure water—but not so pure as it once was. Parody, playfulness, and fantasy combine in this example of protest fiction. In the battle against industrial exploitation, Norman's stalwarts put up a good fight. The story ends on a hopeful, pastoral note with young Wilgus Collier and his friends lying on the creek bank and looking up at the moon as they listen to the music of Ancient Creek. In the essays following the story, Jim Wayne Miller discusses the storyteller's connection to the community. Kevin Eyster writes about the spirit of resilience embodied in this story and in traditional Jack tales. And Annalucia Accardo,

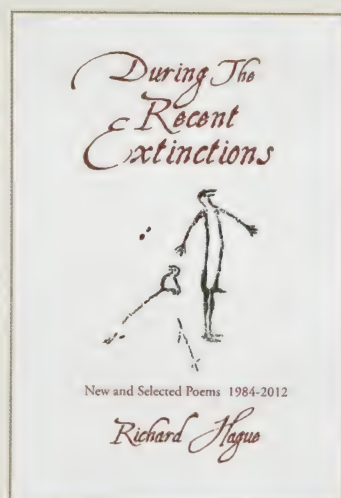
who translated the story into Italian, describes the story's political and symbolic elements. In the concluding essay, Norman tells the story's history, from his writing of it at the time of the Watergate hearings, to its latest publication and recording. ♦



Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina
Kathryn Newfont
University of Georgia Press, 2012

Newfont's impressive research yields a rich and fascinating history of the forests of western North Carolina. Her most important contribution, in terms of protecting the future of the Appalachian forests, is her historical analysis of the shared and competing interests between local people who depend on the forest as a community resource for sustenance and people who

want to turn the forest to other purposes, whether protective, as with national forest preservation efforts, or corporate, as with petroleum development and clear-cutting. This winner of the 2013 Weatherford Award for Nonfiction is a “must read” for environmentalists, Appalachian or otherwise. It reveals the complexity of the fight over control of natural resources and offers a means of fighting more effectively for democratic control of these resources. ♦



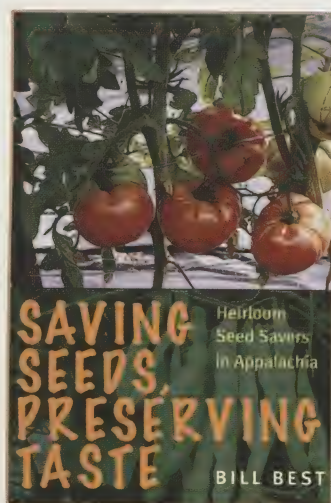
*During the Recent Extinctions,
New and Selected Poems, 1984-
2012*

Richard Hague

Dos Madres Press, 2012

The depth, scope, and artistry of this collection earned it the 2013 Weatherford Award for Poetry. Hague's new collection includes poems from earlier books: *Ripening*, *Possible Debris*, *Mill and Smoke Marrow*, and *Alive in Hard Country*. The poems in the section “During the Recent

Extinctions” are newly collected. World-famous poet Czeslaw Milosz once said that a test of good poetry is whether it would seem relevant even when the bricks in the street are being upturned by bullets. If any poetry meets that severe test, the poetry in this book does. The poems remind readers that, while we are all nearing extinction, individually and collectively, some have met it prematurely and needlessly because of human greed or heedlessness. In effect, this work suggests, the bricks in the street are being upturned, and the ruin is all around us. Hague's poems argue effectively for honoring nature, living one's life well, and fighting for others' chances to do the same. ♦



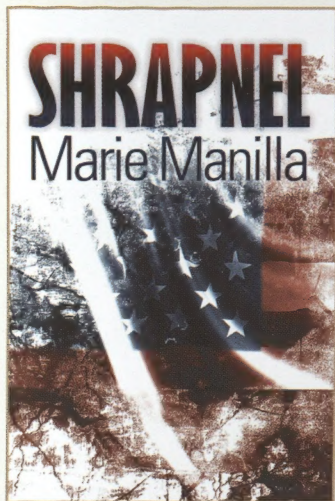
*Saving Seeds, Preserving Taste:
Heirloom Seed Savers in Appa-
lachia*

Bill Best

Ohio University Press, 2013

Readers who have even a passing interest in Appalachian

foodways are likely to find this book an informative pleasure. Best's knowledge is gained from years of experience growing, trading, buying, and selling heritage seeds. His accounts of the history of different kinds of seeds are full of engaging anecdotes, especially about the names of plants: Goose Crow Beans, Trail of Tears Beans, Lazy Wife Greasy Beans, and Radiator Charlie's Mortgage Lifter Tomato. Along with beans and tomatoes, Best writes of corn, apples, tobacco, “candy roasters” (pumpkins and squash), and cucumbers. Along with stories of seeds are stories of seed-savers. Though this is not a “how to” book, Best offers some advice about saving seeds and gives a couple of recipes. The author relates his vast knowledge through an informal, storytelling narrative and addresses his subjects in terms both personal and practical. ♦

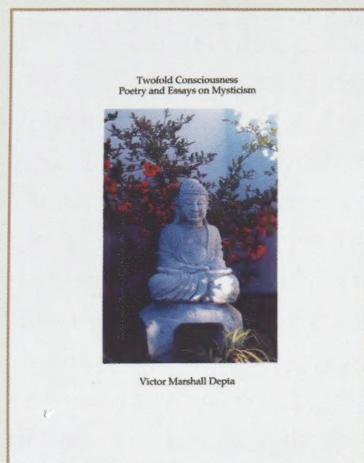


Shrapnel
Marie Manilla

River City Publishing, 2012

Instead of an Appalachian leaving home in search of a job or coming back home after being gone for years, Marie Manilla's novel brings a Texan to the mountains of West Virginia. Bing Butler, a World War II veteran in his late seventies, with all his belongings in a U-Haul, drives from Houston to Huntington to take up residence with his daughter, her husband, and their two teenaged children. Still grieving the recent death of his wife and the earlier death of his son killed in Vietnam, Bing carries old wounds and not many prospects for happiness. *Shrapnel* is the story of an old man opening up to life and changing the lives of the people he loves. The plot has some agonizingly suspenseful moments when Bing gets lost in Mammoth Cave and, later in the story, gets taken for an unwanted ride out to the boondocks, where he finds an old man and a young woman in horrible circumstances. Ma-

nilla's fine character study won the Fred Bonnie Award for Best First Novel. ♦



Twofold Consciousness
Victor Depta

Blair Mountain Press, 2012

In these poems and essays, Victor Depta does not embrace Buddhism uncritically, but he claims it as close kin to his own brand of mysticism, influencing his concept of the nature of nature. As with all his work, this collection reflects his Appalachian coalfield background. However, his familiar, purposely stereotypical "hillbilly" narrator does not make a showing here; the poems in this collection are not ironic. Nonetheless, they are artistically subtle in their expression of the yearning after spiritual union that occupies an important place in Buddhist thought. Through the poems' lyrical meditations, Depta explores themes of spiritual longing, violence in nature, and the interconnections be-

tween happiness and sorrow. His essays are epistolary in a new sense—they are email messages to a friend. He explains, in sometimes funny, sometimes exasperated correspondence, how he sees the relationship between language and consciousness of self and the different realities of the world around us. Depta's views are not quietist; he affirms compassion and activism in his conviction that the enlightenment associated with Buddhist thought is not "a diminishment of the self or a rescue from death; it is, rather, the inspiration for loving-kindness." ♦

Edwina Pendarvis is book reviews editor for *Now & Then*.



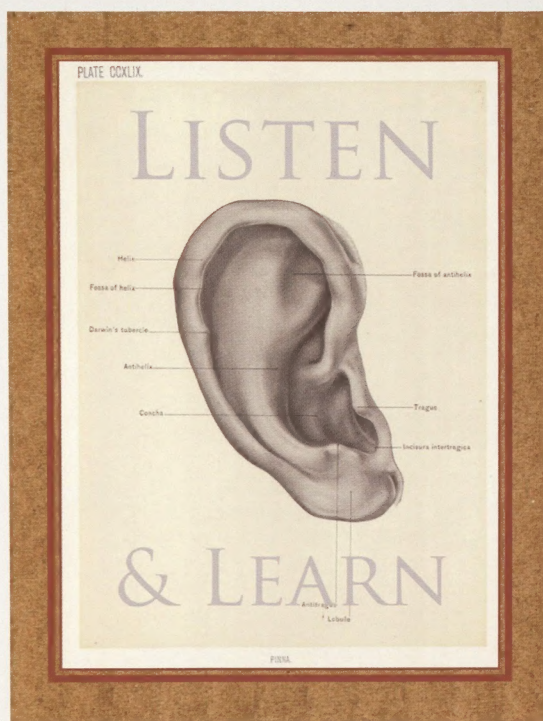
DRONE STRING

SHERRY COOK STANFORTH

we all have our porch songs ready
 to pull from the case, mine smelling
 of red dirt flecked with mica, tasting iron
 wet from Brasstown Bald Creek's current
 hear the drone strumming one round
 note over and over again, telling how
 the old folks left the Isles, scrabbled up
 dinner hollering for the Whippoorwill
 the Blackest Crow, Coo Coo crooning
 over Pretty Saro gone forever from home
 a place now grounded in the mountain's
 shadow—I rise from the dark creek
 water baptized and cleansed by wailing
 harmonies sung in a way to cut my ears
 so I will not forget to come from this dulcimer
 shaped like an hour glass, strumming out
 tunes blown from the grove, from the grave
 my mother's dulcimer sings of time gone by
 so easy to play folks say but they don't hear
 like I do—the whine of a northbound train
 that call from a boy felling logs of white pine
 onto Tennessee ground, the shape of melody
 plucked robin's egg blue, the tones
 of four generations steered straight
 by aunts and grandmothers who set their jaw
 lines sharper than the whetted Cherokee ridges
 made to climb the valley of the shadow, chanting
 finding no rest between the slow-plucked notes
 my mother's worn down callused fingers hold
 down the strings of this good old song I sing

Sherry Cook Stanforth is the Creative Writing Vision program director at Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, Kentucky, and co-editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*.

Signing Off



We included a reader survey in the last issue of *Now & Then*, and we are grateful to those of you who responded. The data gathered from that survey are invaluable to our ongoing effort to improve the magazine. You will find one of those improvements with this issue—polybagging the magazine for shipment.

We are especially heartened that half of the respondents took the time to add comments—a sampling of which are shown below:

Our library purchases this title for our local history section. The local or Appalachian based stories are why we subscribe.

I am a new subscriber. I like it. If you need advertisers—ok—as long as appropriate.

Cost is comparable to other magazines. Maybe advertisement (of the right kind) could help to keep the cost down. It is a magazine of high quality—don't cheapen it.

Rather have a price increase and no ads.

More literary. More features on writers and artists. More poetry.

You're doing a good job. Don't mess with it.

Now & Then is a great way to learn about this area and has evolved over the years to become a "must read" for everyone!

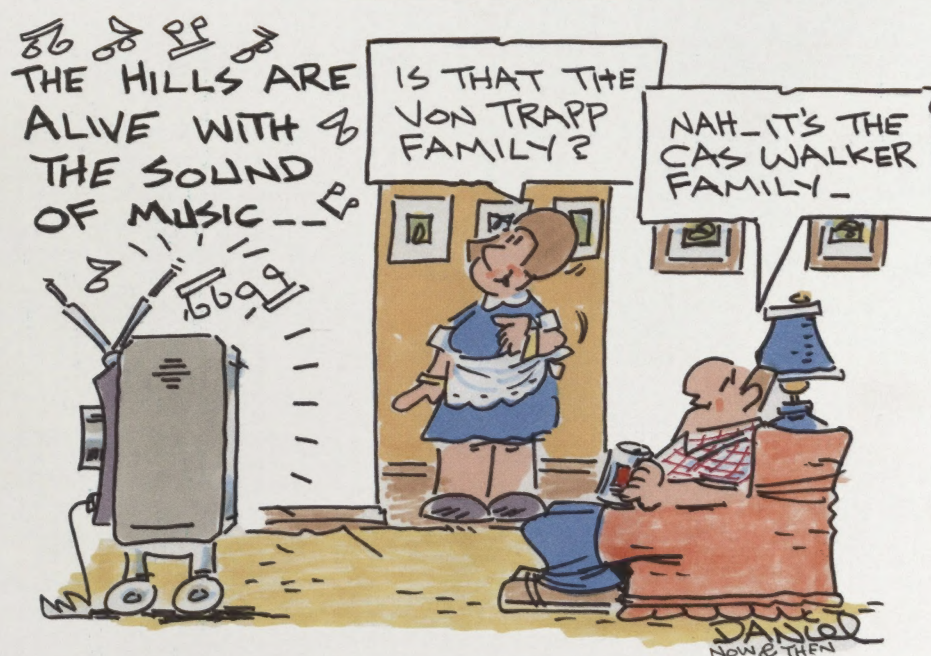
Coming in June 2014: "Civil Wars in Appalachia."

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The late Orton Caswell "Cas" Walker operated a chain of grocery stores in East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Southeast Kentucky. He hosted radio and television programs in Knoxville, Tennessee, promoting his stores, his political career, and the music of the region. Among the entertainers whose careers were boosted by Cas and his shows was fellow Sevier Countian Dolly Parton.

Charlie Daniel is editorial cartoonist for the *Knoxville News Sentinel*.